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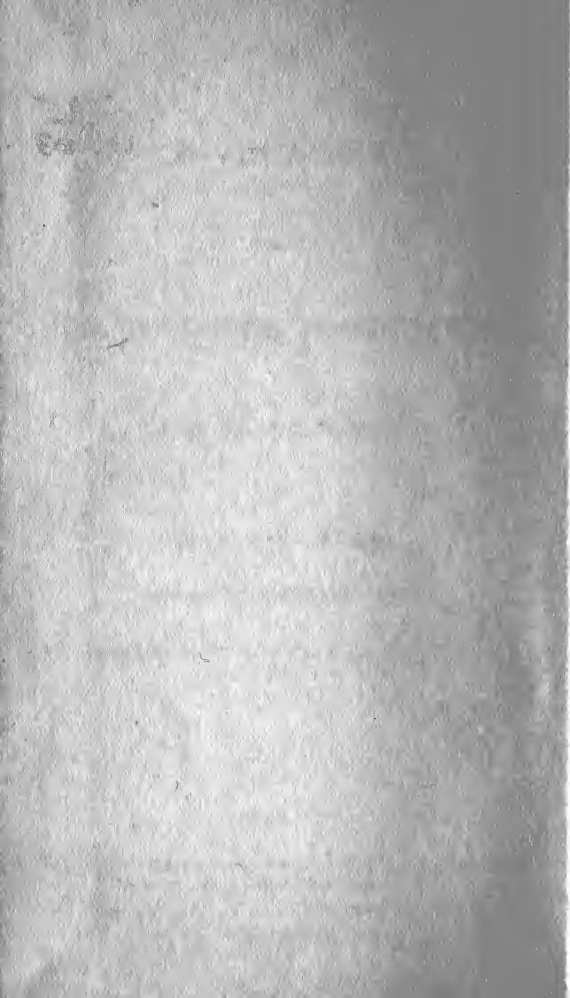
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VINDICATION

OF

METHODIST EPISCOPACY.



BY

NATHAN BANGS.

“ Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall
be increased.”—*Daniel*, xii. 4.



NEW-YORK :

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Southern District of New-York, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twelfth day of September, in the forty-fifth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Nathan Bangs, of the said District, hath deposited in this office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as Proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

“A Vindication of Methodist Episcopacy. By Nathan Bangs.”
“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”—*Daniel*, xii. 4.

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned.” And also to an Act, entitled “An Act, supplementary to an Act, entitled an Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.”

G. L. THOMPSON,

Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.



VINDICATION, &c.

Preliminary Observations.

PERHAPS there are few subjects of a religious nature involved in greater obscurity, and which have occasioned sharper disputes, than the question, *What was the primitive mode of Church government?* Its obscurity, indeed, affords a very obvious reason why ecclesiastical writers have been so much divided concerning it;—for those questions which are expressly revealed as articles of faith, or may be easily deduced from given principles, do not so readily admit of controversy; and, therefore, respecting all such, Christians are more generally agreed.

If we had a systematical draft of the primitive Church in the Sacred Scriptures, with specific reference to the order and manner of consecrating her ministers, the particular mode of her government, &c., we might determine, with greater precision, on this important question: but we are left to

form our judgment upon these points, from insulated passages of Scripture, used by the writer for other purposes than to prove any particular mode of Church government, from historical narratives, and from incidental circumstances. This imperfect manner, in which the order of the Church is sketched out in the Holy Scriptures, affords no small proof that no specific mode is essential to constitute an evangelical Church; otherwise the Holy Ghost would doubtless have left us full information respecting the exact manner of organizing the Church, and the official duties of her ministers.

The agitated state of the Christian world in relation to this subject, originating, not only from the causes already noticed, but also from the prejudice of education, and the different usages which have obtained among the several orders of Christians, renders it somewhat difficult to settle the present question satisfactorily. Nothing, indeed, is more common than for each community of Christians to make their own established forms of Church government, a medium of Scrip-

ture interpretation upon this subject; and to establish their point, they bring to their aid a huge mass of testimony, collected from the uncertain traditions of the Church. Thus, no sooner does a Protestant Episcopalian read the word Bishop, than his imagination beholds a modern diöcesan, having ecclesiastical jurisdiction over a specified number of parishes and of parish ministers. A Presbyterian thinks he sees the pastor of a single congregation, officiating at stated times, according to a mutual contract between him and his people. A Roman Catholic, with loftier look than either of the former, recognizes, whenever he reads of Peter or Paul, *a Pope*, seated in splendid opulence, surrounded with his twelve cardinals, and holding an infalliable jurisdiction over the judgments and consciences of all his clergy and people. In this manner, each, looking through the glass of his own Church establishment, views as many different modes of Church government, as there are different orders of professing Christians.

In the midst of such jarring sentiments, on

a subject rendered more obscure and perplexing still, by the manner in which it has been handled by some writers, it cannot be reasonably expected that demonstration will accompany our inquiries. Divesting ourselves, however, as far as possible, of prejudice and prepossession, let us approach the subject with that calmness and deliberation which ought ever to accompany us in the investigation of truth, and with that diffidence which becomes dependent and fallible creatures.

This inquiry is entered upon at present, for the following reasons.

1. It has frequently been asserted, especially by the Protestant Episcopal Church, that, whatever right we may have to preach the gospel, we have no authority to administer the ordinances, because we have not received a valid ordination. This specious objection (formerly urged against them by the Catholics) it seems necessary to obviate. Let it be recollected, however, that while our own ministry is vindicated from what we consider a false aspersion, we pretend not to

call in question the authority of other Churches. Were it practicable, we would gladly avoid all animadversions on any other Christian community, and present the question unembarrassed with controversy; but the rude manner in which we have been assailed upon this point, by some who set up an exclusive claim to a valid ministry, by virtue of an uninterrupted succession of bishops superior to elders, from the Apostles' days, makes it necessary to notice some of their arguments. This, however, shall be done in as inoffensive a way as the nature of the subject will admit; being desirous to give needless pain to no one; much less to unchristian them, by calling in question the authority of their ministers, or the validity of their ordinances. For the reasons already assigned, ecclesiastical writers, who investigate this subject, ought to evince a spirit of forbearance towards each other. Were an exact archetype of the Christian Church, as it relates to her ministerial orders and functions, found in the Holy Scriptures, we could speak with less diffidence, and pronounce with

greater certainty. But, without presuming to condemn others, we think we have sufficient authority from the Scriptures of truth, and from the usages of the primitive Church, to do as we have done, and as we still continue to do.

It is certainly matter of no small consequence to ascertain whether all the persons baptized by us, and others not belonging to the Protestant Episcopalians, were legally baptized or not,—whether all those who receive the sacraments at our hands, are guilty of partaking of unconsecrated bread and wine,—and whether all those ministers who honestly dissent from them in respect to the divine right of episcopacy, are intruders into the sacred office. The sweeping arguments used by our antagonists upon this subject, spread wide desolation among the Churches not under their ecclesiastical jurisdiction. From the unhappy consequences resulting from such comprehensive assertions, as go to exclude all others from the right of administering the ordinances of Christ, we think ourselves bound in conscience to exempt our-

selves, because we think it a matter of high importance to justify a practice so intimately connected with the present and future happiness of immortal souls.

2. This is the more necessary, because there are very many among us, not having made this subject a matter of study, are at a loss for arguments of self defence when assailed by those who endeavour to shake their faith. For the purpose of confirming the faith of all such, an analogy between our own and the primitive Church will be attempted.

3. There are others to whom we are little known. They may have heard of us by the hearing of the ear, and perhaps the reports have generally been unfavourable. To rectify the mistakes of all such, we will present them with a concise, but impartial view of the manner in which our ministers are called, educated, consecrated, and governed.—They will then be able to judge for themselves respecting the authority of our ministry, and the validity of our ordinances.

In accomplishing the object we have in

view, it is not necessary to plod through the annals of Church history, from the Apostles to the present time. This would be a toilsome work. Among other reasons which might be offered for avoiding a mode of investigation so prolix and perplexing, one is, that the corruptions which shaded the pure doctrines of Christianity at an early period of the Church, also affected, in no small degree, the leaders of the flock. Pride and ambition prompted those of them, who had become eminent by their talents, to exercise a lordly dominion over their inferiors, and to extend their clerical jurisdiction beyond the bounds originally prescribed them by Christ and his Apostles. Having once gained the ascendancy, so far from suffering a diminution of their power and authority, they sought every opportunity to augment and strengthen it. In vain, therefore, may we seek for a primitive model of the Church, among the writings of the Fathers, especially after the close of the third century of the Christian era. In the course of this investigation, however, we hope to derive some assistance

from the early history of the Church, reminding ourselves, in the mean time, of the fallibility of ecclesiastical writers, upon this, as well as upon all other subjects. When we take leave of the inspired writers, we no longer have an infallible guide.

To the Scriptures, therefore, we must make our ultimate appeal, upon this, as well as upon all other subjects of an ecclesiastical nature. So far as they lend us their infallible light, and we suffer ourselves to be guided by it, we shall not be led astray. However, that the Church has always been governed by Bishops, if we understand that term according to its primitive import, cannot be truly disputed; but that the word designated an officer in the Church, at its first establishment, distinct from, and superior to elders, is, we believe, more than can be proved.

Having made these preliminary observations, we proceed to inquire,

1. Into the distinct orders of ministers by which the primitive Church was instructed and governed; and in prosecuting the inqui-

ry, we shall endeavour to ascertain the duties peculiar to each.

CHAPTER I.

Deacons a distinct order in the Church.

I. It will be admitted, I presume, on all hands, that there were what were called *Διακονοι*, Deacons, (servants,) in the Church : and besides their being charged with distributing the alms of the Church to the poor, it was their duty to preach the word. It appears evident from Acts vi. 6, that they were solemnly set apart to their office by prayer and imposition of hands. And though civil magistrates are designated by the same term in various parts of Scripture, and though these men, mentioned in Acts, were especially called to administer to the poor widows, yet it is manifest that they were successful ministers of the Gospel of Christ; for it is said of Stephen, who was one of the seven deacons above-mentioned, that he was “full of faith and power,” and that he “did great wonders and miracles among the people,” Acts vi. 8. And in the very next chapter, we have recorded his admirable

discourse which he delivered in his own defence, in the presence of his inveterate enemies and accusers, the Jews. Philip was also one of those before-mentioned, that was set apart by prayer and imposition of hands, by the Apostles : but in Acts viii. 4, it is said, “ Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word; ver. 5. “ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them;” and in verse 12, we read, “ But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” From these Scripture facts, it is undeniably manifest, that those denominated deacons in the Church of God, were not merely lay-members, appointed for the temporal services of the Church; but they were approved ministers of the word, successfully employed in carrying the glad tidings of salvation to the Gentile world.

That these servants of the Church were a grade of ministers inferior, in respect to office, to the elders, is evident from several

considerations. 1. Though all ministers, and even Christ himself, were called *Διακονοι*, *Servants*, on account of their faithful services in the Church, yet these men were emphatically so called, because, it is supposed, they were appointed to serve the Apostles, by acting under their special direction. 2. St. Paul, 1 Tim. iii. after having characterized the persons proper for bishops, proceeds to notice the duties of the deacons,—“ Likewise must the deacons be grave:” “ For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” From this passage, it appears obvious, that after being *proved*, ver. 10, as probationers in the ministry, and having been exalted to the office of *deacons by the imposition of hands*; and also having *used the office of a deacon well*, they *purchased to themselves a good degree*; that is, they were qualified to become elders in the Church. These considerations sufficiently evince the inferiority of the deacons to the elders; and yet they were preachers of the word, and had

authority to administer the ordinance of baptism, as appears from Acts viii. 12.

The same order of men is recognized, and as ministers of the word too, in the epistles of the primitive Fathers,—“ Let the *deacons* be blameless in his sight, as the *ministers* of God in Christ, and not of men : not evil speakers, nor double tongued, not lovers of money ; but compassionate, careful, diligent, temperate in all things, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all.” Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians. St. Ignatius also, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, distinguishes between the order of *deacons* and *bishops* : “ Concerning my fellow-servant *Burrahs*, according to the will of God your *deacon*, blessed in all things, I pray that he may remain to the honour of you and your *bishop*.” And in his Epistle to the Magnesians, after mentioning the bishop and presbyters, as a higher order of ministers, he says, “ And your *deacons*, most dear to me, being intrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ.” He introduces them, in his Epistle to the Trallians, in a similar way, recognizing

them as ministers of the Gospel of Christ.—
 “The *deacons* also, as being the ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, must, by all means, please all : for they are not the ministers of meat and drink, but of the Church of God. Therefore they must avoid all offences, as they would do fire.” To the Philadelphians he observes, “As concerning Philo, the *deacon* of Cilicia, he still ministers unto me in the word of God.” To the Smyrneans he says, “Ye have done well in that ye have received Philo and Rheus, who followed me for the word of God, the *deacons* of Christ our God.”

From these quotations, both from the word of God and the writings of these Fathers, it appears evident that those denominated deacons, were not mere lay-members attending to the temporalities of the Church; but they were regular ministers of the word, were set apart for that work by the laying on of the hands of the Apostles, and that they did administer the ordinance of baptism, and very probably assisted in the holy eucharist.

Let us now see whether the Methodist

Episcopal Church has, in this respect, followed the Apostolic usage and custom. After having proved a young man, who thinks himself called of God to the work of the ministry, by employing him two years as a probationer in the *itinerating* ministry, he is, if no sufficient reason can be assigned to the contrary, ordained a *deacon*, by the laying on of the hands of the bishop. And what are the duties peculiar to his office as a *deacon*? Ans. "It appertaineth to the office of a deacon to assist the elder in divine service.— And especially, when he ministereth the holy communion, to help him in the distribution thereof, and to read and expound the Holy Scriptures; to instruct the youth, and in the absence of the elder, to baptize. And furthermore, it is his office to search for the sick, poor, and impotent, that they may be visited and relieved."*

So also it is said in section 7th of the form of discipline concerning the duties of a travelling deacon, that he is, 1st, "To baptize, and perform the office of matrimony, in the

* Consecration service.

absence of the elder. 2d, To assist the elder in administering the Lord's Supper. 3d, To do all the duties of a travelling preacher." Here, then, are enumerated all those duties of a deacon, which the Holy Scriptures have authorized him to perform. In this part of our ministry, therefore, we have not *followed a cunningly devised fable*, but the word of the living God. And which Church is most according to Apostolic order, that which has preaching deacons, going to and fro, sowing the seed of eternal life; or that which has but one order of ministers, by whatever name they may be called, and whose deacons are recognized only as lay-members, and attend only to the temporal concerns of the Church, or at least are never connected with the ministry? Those who have attentively considered the above extracts from Ignatius, and others, and have compared them with the Scripture quotations, must acknowledge that we have all the authority any one could desire to justify our practice in respect to this officer in the Church. In the Apostles' days, he preached, baptized, and took the

oversight of the poor : our discipline enjoins the same duties on the deacons; therefore, in this respect, we are Apostolic.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Elders, and their duty.

The second officer in the Church, in the order of the ministry, is *Elder*, or *Presbyter*, and who is sometimes called *Bishop*. That those denominated *Bishops*, *Elders*, or *Presbyters*, in the Apostolical writings, were one and the same order of men, we will now endeavour to demonstrate.

St. Paul, in his letter to Titus, assigning a reason why he left him in Crete, says, "That thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain ELDERS in every city, as I had appointed thee."—"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly : For a BISHOP must be blameless, as the steward of God." In this passage, it is most obvious that the Apostle uses the word πρεσβυτερος, *Elder*, or *Presbyter*, and πισκοπος, *Bishop*, or as the word should be more properly rendered,

overseer, as convertible terms, designating thereby the same person; for the same character is described throughout the passage as should be suitable to be *ordained* to the office of an *overseer* or elder in the Church of God. And here we may observe, that in as much as the deacons were appointed to their office by the imposition of hands and prayer, and as the elders were set apart to their office by the same ceremony, it is reasonable to conclude, that, in order to constitute an elder, there was a second consecration; which is according to the present usage in an Episcopal Church. This argument may be deemed sufficient, at least, to justify the practice of laying on of the hands of the presbytery, to constitute a deacon an elder in the Church.

To return :—In Acts xx. 17, it is said that St. Paul sent for the *αἱρεσιάρχους*, *elders* of the Church; and in verse 28, he addresses them in the following manner,—“ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *ἐπισκοπους*, *bishops* or *overseers*.” In this

place, it is equally manifest that the identical persons are called, indifferently, elders and overseers, a proof that they were then considered the same order. And that these bishops or overseers could not have had that extensive jurisdiction, which a modern diocesan has, nor have been of a superior grade to elders, is evident, from there having been a *plurality* of them in the single city of Ephesus. A plurality of diocesan bishops, exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction over a number of presbyters or elders, each of whom had charge of a particular congregation, in one city ! Such a phenomenon could not have existed in the Church at that, nor at any subsequent period. That there was not an order of ministers, called elders, inferior to bishops, but superior to deacons, in the Church at that time, may be fairly concluded from St. Paul's address to the Philippians, chap. i. 1. He dedicates his Epistle, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." If there had been an order of ministers in this Church coming between the bishops and deacons, called *elders*, is it not highly

probable the Apostle would have mentioned them in this connexion ? This circumstance, therefore, I consider no slender proof of our position, namely, that bishops and elders were one order.

Let it be recollected, that those ministers, denominated bishops now, are never confined to a single congregation, but their charge extends over a number of parishes, including, in the bounds of their jurisdiction, more or less of presbyters and deacons; whereas, in the primitive times, they were each pastors of a single congregation, and this is another proof they were not a superior order to the elders. And this is manifest, not only from the Scriptures already adduced, but also from the writings of the primitive Fathers, as well as the testimony of ecclesiastical history. “It is, therefore, necessary, that without your *bishop* you should do nothing.” Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians. “Let no man,” says he, to the Smyrneans, “do any thing of what belongs to the Church, separately from the bishop. Let that eucharist be looked upon as well established, which is either offered by the bishop, or by him to whom the bishop has given his consent. Wheresoever

the bishop shall appear, there let the people also be : as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop, either to baptize or to celebrate the holy communion; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God." So St. Polycarp, who was bishop of the Church of Smyrna, says, "Let nothing be done without thy knowledge and consent : neither do thou any thing but according to the will of God, as also thou dost, with all constancy. Let your assemblies be more frequent : inquire into all by name."

Now, although it is not said expressly, in either of the above quotations, that the bishop was the pastor of a single congregation, yet it is obviously inferable he was so, from the duties he is exhorted to perform, as well as from what the Church is commanded to do in reference to their bishop. If from the duties of his office he exercised an extensive jurisdiction over a number of cities and provinces, resembling the episcopal charge of a modern diocesan, how could he see all things done with his own eyes? How could he "inquire into all by name," not even "overlook-

ing the men and maid servants," as Polycarp was commanded to do! If not "lawful to baptize, nor celebrate the holy communion, nor even to marry," without the bishop, nor "do any thing of what appertains to the Church," without him, then surely there must have been a bishop always resident in every congregation, as its immediate pastor. It would not have been possible to have performed these duties, if the bishops of those days held the same rank in the Church which they now do. These very epistles, therefore, so often appealed to in support of an uninterrupted succession of bishops, holding an extensive episcopal jurisdiction over presbyters, deacons and people, prove directly the reverse; for it is manifest that the bishops in the days of Ignatius, instead of resembling the bishops of our day, were more like the stated pastors of the Presbyterian congregations, or the stated elders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in their city and country charges.

Such pastors, exercising their office as elders or overseers in their individual charges, may comply with the requisitions before

mentioned by Ignatius. They can know (especially those whose church members are divided into "small companies, called classes," and are met by the minister once in three months) *each person by name*; can administer the sacraments, *visit the sick and poor of the flock*, perform the marriage rites, and personally superintend all the spiritual and temporal concerns of the Church. And in those cities where a number of pastors are united together over several congregations, one of these elders, better qualified on account of his talent, age, and experience, may, for the time being, have the special oversight of all the rest; and in this sense he may be termed a bishop or overseer, in distinction from the elders who act under him, though, at the same time, he may not be of a higher grade in the ministry. This, in respect to our own Church, we know is frequently done. Allowing this to have been the custom in the primitive Church, and without doubt it was, we can easily reconcile the language of Ignatius, and others of the Fathers, in other parts of their epistles, with the quotations already made from

their writings. Thus Ignatius exhorts the Ephesians, "That ye all come together, in one faith, obeying your bishop and your presbytery with entire affection." In his epistle to the Magnesians, his language is in perfect conformity to this idea:—"Your bishop," says he, "*presiding* in the place of God; your presbyters in the place of the council of the Apostles." "As, therefore, the Lord did nothing without the Father, neither by himself, nor yet by his Apostles; so neither do ye any thing without your *bishop* and *presbyters*."

From such, and other similar passages found in the Apostolic Fathers, some have inferred that the bishops were a distinct order from the elders; whereas the truth appears to be, that those here called bishops, were such of the elders as were appointed to preside in their councils, and to take the oversight, as presidents, of all the elders, (where a number of them were associated together in one charge,) deacons, and people: otherwise, these bishops must have occupied the place of the itinerating evangelists, who were, in the Apostles' days, an order of ministers

superior to the elders, and who extended their oversight to the whole Church. If, however, this were the case, they no longer held that distinguished rank among the Churches, they formerly did, as itinerating ministers; because, it is evident, these bishops were stationary, having each the charge of a particular congregation; which could not have been the case with those itinerating evangelists, who, like the apostles, were continually moving from place to place, and taking the special oversight of all the Churches.

That our ideas respecting the work and rank of these elders or bishops, are correct, will appear further evident from ecclesiastical history, which, indeed, derives its information respecting these circumstances, from those writings we have already consulted: but it is appealed to here, to show that impartial men, who have examined this subject, were of the same sentiment with ourselves. Mosheim, after having spoken concerning the government of the Church, at its first establishment, observes, "Such was the institution of the Christian Church.

in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither numerous nor splendid. Three or four presbyters, men of remarkable piety and wisdom, ruled these small congregations in perfect harmony; nor did they stand in need of any president or superior, to maintain concord and order, where no dissensions were known. But the number of the presbyters and deacons increasing with that of the Churches, and the sacred work of the ministry growing more painful and weighty, by a number of additional duties,—these new circumstances required new regulations. It was then judged necessary, that one man, of distinguished gravity and wisdom, should *preside* in the council of *presbyters*, in order to distribute among his colleagues their several tasks, and to be a centre of union to the whole society. This person was, at first, styled the *angel* of the Church to which he belonged, but was afterwards distinguished by the name of bishop; a name borrowed from the Greek language, and expressing the principal part of the episcopal function, which was to inspect into, and superintend the affairs of the Church.

It is highly probable, that the Church of Jerusalem, grown considerably numerous, and deprived of the ministry of the Apostles, who were gone to instruct the other nations, was the first who chose a president or bishop."

"Let none, however, confound the bishops of this primitive and golden period of the church, with those of whom we read in the following ages. For, though they were both distinguished by the same name, yet they differed extremely, and that in many respects. A bishop, during the first and second century, was a person who had *the care of one Christian assembly*, which, at that time, was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted not so much with the authority of a *master*, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful *servant*. He instructed the people, performed the several parts of divine worship, attended the sick, and inspected into the circumstances and supplies of the poor. He charged, indeed, the presbyters with the performance of those duties and services, which the multiplicity of his engagements rendered it impossible for

him to fulfil;—but had not the power to decide or enact any thing without the consent of the presbyters and people.”—Vol. i. p. 102.

Those who impartially attend to this quotation from Mosheim, cannot but notice the coincidence between the practice of the primitive Church and that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in respect to the office and work of their elders or presbyters. In the absence of the Apostles, the presbyters appointed one of their own order to “preside in their councils,” and “to distribute among his colleagues their several tasks ;” and was so far from exercising a lordly influence over his brethren as a superior minister, that he behaved as a servant, and had his own charge as an individual pastor. Every one who has made himself acquainted with our economy, knows this to be our practice. In those cities, for instance, where a number of elders are required to act in conjunction, one is selected to take the charge of the whole : the others form his council, with whom he confers on all matters of importance, and he assigns to each his work. In this respect,

therefore, we have the sanction of the primitive Church for what we do. And if further testimony were necessary, to corroborate the testimony of Mosheim on this subject, we might add that of Tertullian, who says, “ Those who preside among us are *elderly* persons, not distinguished for their opulence, but worth of character.”

That these ministers, denominated bishops and elders, were equal in ecclesiastical authority, except under the circumstances above-mentioned, is further evident from the testimony of some modern episcopal writers themselves.

It ought to be recollected, that at the time of the Reformation, those denominated Protestants, in consequence of their having protested against the unscriptural usurpations of the Church of Rome, were assailed by their adversaries, in a similar manner, and with the same arguments, with which they now attempt to overthrow us. The Church of Rome contended for uninterrupted succession in the episcopal office, and that this succession was confined to that Church, from which the reformers had seceded; and, there-

fore, it was urged, with great vehemence, that the Protestants were an unauthorized body of ministers. To repel these arguments, the Protestant bishops plead the necessity of a reform, and that they were justified on that ground, even allowing the truth of the doctrine of succession, in departing from the established order of the Church they had left. Not resting, however, their cause upon this single point, they assumed the proposition we have already attempted to establish, namely, that, in the primitive Church, bishops and presbyters were one order of ministers, and were invested with full powers to consecrate inferior and superior ministers, and to govern the Church. This is proveable from their own words.

Thus, Archbishop Usher, in his letter to Dr. Bernard : “ I have ever declared my opinion to be, that *episcopus and presbytre, gradu tantum differunt non ordine*, and, consequently, that in places where bishops cannot be had, the ordination of presbyters stands valid.” The same prelate, in his answer to Baxter, says, “ The king having asked me at the Isle of Wight, whether I found in anti-

quity that presbyters alone ordained any ? I replied, Yes; and that I could show his majesty more, even where presbyters alone successively ordained bishops."

Sillingfleet, in his *Ironicum*, observes, that "bishops and priests were, at one time, not two things, but both one office, in the beginning of Christ's religion."

In vindicating St. Jerome from the charge of contradiction, which some strove to fix upon him, Stillingfleet says, "Jerome spends great part of his epistle, to prove that a bishop and a presbyter are the same. Is it imaginable, that a man, who had been proving all along the superiority of a presbyter above a deacon, because of his identity with a bishop in the Apostles' time, should, at the same time, say, that a bishop was above a presbyter by the Apostle's instruction, and so directly overthrow all he had been saying before ? The plain meaning of Jerome, then, is no more than this; as Aaron and his sons, in the order of priesthood, were above the Levites, under the law; so the bishops and presbyters, in the order of the evangelical priesthood, are above the deacons, under the

gospel. The comparison runs not between Aaron and his sons under the law, and bishops and presbyters under the gospel; but between Aaron and his sons as one part, and the Levites as the other; so, under the gospel, bishops and presbyters make one part of the comparison, and the other part, under the gospel, is that of deacons. The opposition is between the same power of order, which is alike in bishops and presbyters, to that of deacons, which stood in competition with them. The scope and drift of Jerome's epistle, was to chastize one who made deacons superior (or equal) to presbyters."

Now, from these quotations from ecclesiastical writers of acknowledged probity and ability, it appears evident that they understood the scriptures upon this point as we do. But the question now arises, *What powers did these presbyters or bishops possess?* Had they the inherent right to govern the Church, to consecrate ministers, and to do the whole work of the ministry? These are questions of no small importance, in determining the validity of the ordinances, as ad-

ministered by the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In pursuance of this design, I shall undertake to prove, that the body of elders, in their collective capacity, had the right of consecrating ministers, and of establishing ordinances for the government of the Church. The first authority to which we appeal for the support of this proposition, is Acts xiii. 1, where we have an account of St. Paul's consecration. "Now there were in the Church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." This is the only place that I know of, where we read of St. Paul's being set apart by men to the work of the ministry; and this was performed by an associated bo-

dy of ministers, denominated *prophets and teachers*. This passage of sacred scripture gives us an accurate idea of the primitive method of consecrating men for the gospel ministry. Not one of the twelve Apostles is mentioned in this list of names : from whence we may conclude that the power of consecration was not confined to them, from whom it is pretended that the right of ordaining ministers is derived. Neither are they called bishops; although there can be no doubt but they were elders, or the authorized overseers of the Church; otherwise, St. Paul would never have consented to receive his credentials, as a minister, from them. But that he felt himself invested with an authority now, which he did not before possess, is manifest, from his entering immediately upon the work of establishing churches, wherever success attended his ministerial labours; a work in which we do not find him engaged heretofore, although he had long been employed in preaching the gospel.

From 1 Tim. iv. 14, it appears that Timothy was set apart for the work of the ministry

by the same means. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." It is true, the Apostle exhorts Timothy, in his second epistle, to "stir up the gift of God which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands." But these two passages may be easily reconciled, either by supposing that St. Paul himself ordained Timothy to the office of a deacon, and that he was consecrated afterwards to the office of an elder, by the *laying on of the hands of the presbytery*; or, that when he was consecrated to his sacred office, the presbyters assisted in the ceremony, the Apostle acting as the *presiding* minister. Both of these usages are sanctioned by an episcopal ordination. From these examples, we are authorized in concluding, that an associated body of elders have the right of consecrating men, otherwise qualified, for the work of the ministry. We shall apply this remark to the first establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church, when we come to that part of our subject; for it appears evident, from the account above referred to of St. Paul's consecration, that

elders did ordain men who were appointed to rule over them in the ministry.

But let us now inquire whether the practice of the Church in after ages corroborates the interpretation we have given to the above passages of scripture. Let it be remembered, in the mean time, that we are not now inquiring whether there were, or were not, ministers in the Church superior to elders or bishops, nor whether these superior ministers did ordain other inferior ministers or not ;—but the question now under consideration is, whether elders and bishops were the same order of ministers, and whether they possessed the *right* of consecration. These two last positions we maintain are defensible, both from scripture and the primitive usage of the Church. As we have already adduced scripture testimony on the point, we will now proceed to introduce the testimony of ecclesiastical writers of a more modern date.

Those who are acquainted with the history of the Church, well know that the presbyters of the Church at Alexandria were in the habit of ordaining their bishops, when-

ever a vacancy happened by death or otherwise. For the truth of this, we have the testimony of Archbishop Usher, of St. Jerome, and of Eutychius, a patriarch of Alexandria. The reason, it is presumed, why this practice was kept up in the Church of Alexandria is, that those presbyters preferred the simple mode of primitive ordination to that more pompous method which had obtained in some other branches of the Church, after the liberty of the presbyters was restricted, by investing that authority in the hands of superior ministers.

That the presbyters possessed this power, and exercised it, is conceded by many eminent men, even bishops of the Church of England. Stillingfleet, after having spoken of the usages of the Jewish Church, says, “The same distinction may be observed under the gospel, in reference to the fixed officers of the Church; for we may consider them in their first state and period; as the *presbyters* did rule the Church in common, as *Jerome* tells us. Before the jurisdiction of presbyters was restrained by mutual con-

sent, the presbyters enjoyed the same liberty that the presbyters among the Jews did, of *ordaining* other presbyters, by that power they were invested in, or with, at their own ordination. In the first primitive church, the presbyters all acted in common, for the welfare of the church, and either did, or might ordain to the same authority with themselves ; because the intrinsical power of order is equally in them, and in those who were afterwards appointed governors over presbyters. And the collation of orders doth run from the power of order, and not merely from the power of jurisdiction.

“ It being likewise fully acknowledged by the schoolmen, that bishops are not superior above presbyters, as to the power of order. The clearest evidence of this is in the Church of Alexandria, of which Jerome speaks. To which we may add what Eutychius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, saith in his *Origines Ecclesiæ Alexandrinæ*, (or Annals of the Church of Alexandria,) published in Arabic by the most learned Selden, who expressly affirms, *that* the twelve presbyters, constituted by Mark, upon the vacancy of the see, did choose out of

their number, one to be head over the rest, and the other eleven did lay their hands upon him, and blessed him, and made him patriarch." From these quotations, and many more might be added, it appears evident that presbyters, in the days of the apostles, and for some time afterwards, did ordain other presbyters, and also, when it was thought expedient, they ordained those who should be placed over them.

We are now prepared, I think, to meet the great objection which has been so often made against the validity of the ordination of the first officers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by Mr. Wesley, because he was nothing more than a presbyter in the Church of England. Presbyters ordained in the primitive Church, and when Mr. Wesley consecrated Thomas Coke, LL. D. who was also a presbyter of the English Church, other presbyters of the same Church were associated with him, and assisted in the ceremony. Thus far then, all is according to apostolic order.

But, perhaps, the most material objection remains yet unobviated, namely, "That if the power of ordination was radically in the

eldership, why did not Mr. Wesley leave it there? Why did he consecrate Dr. Coke, who was already an elder, to the office of a superintendent or bishop? To this objection I would answer, in the first place, in the language of Mr. Wesley himself, that he preferred the Episcopal mode of Church government to any other; and therefore, when he was about to establish the societies raised up under his care in America, into an independent community, he followed the dictates of his own judgment, and gave them the episcopal form of Church government.

But, says the objector, "have presbyters authority to constitute a minister superior to themselves?" Undoubtedly. It will be admitted, I believe, on all hands, that the Apostles were a grade of ministers superior to the elders; and yet, as we have already seen, St. Paul was ordained by a body of elders, Acts 13, 1—4.

CHAPTER III.

Of Evangelists and their Duty.

A third order in the Church, called Evangelists, were the immediate successors of

the apostles. That the apostles themselves held a spiritual dominion over all the elders, deacons, and people, is indisputable. The apostle Paul, after enumerating his labours and sufferings in the cause of Christ, says, "Besides that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches." These were the men who astonished the world with their immense labours, while they itinerated through the land, and proclaimed every where *that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe*. And they must have had successors in this great work. These were the great itinerating evangelists; among whom were Timothy and Titus.— "These were ministers in the primitive Church, who seem to have been assistants to the apostles, in propagating the Gospel; and whom, accordingly, they sent from place to place, to execute such particular commission as they thought proper to intrust them with."* In Acts xxi. 8. Philip, who was one of the seven deacons appointed formerly to administer to the poor widows, is called

* Parkhurst.

an Evangelist. It is highly probable, that, having “used the office of a deacon well, he had purchased to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith:” and accordingly he had been raised, on account of his eminent attainments and great usefulness in the ministry, not only to the office of an elder, but to that of an evangelist. So Timothy, 2d Epistle, chap. iv. ver. 5. is exhorted to do the work of an evangelist. To these itinerating ministers was committed the general oversight of the Church, in the absence of the apostles, during the lifetime of the latter; and after their death these evangelists succeeded them in the government of the Church; and this is the order of ministers, who in after days, when the title of evangilests would not apply to them, on account of their having abandoned the labour of an itinerant life and ministry, were denominated bishops.

That they were assistants to the apostles during their lifetime, is manifest from several considerations. 1. In Acts xix. 21, 22, it is said, that when Paul “purposed in his spirit to go into Macedonia, &c.” he “sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered

unto him, Timotheus and Erastus," while "he himself stayed in Asia for a season." From this account, it is evident that Timothy was sent by the apostle to supply his lack of service until he should arrive; which manifestly proves that Timothy acted as an aid to the apostle.

2. Titus, who was another of these Evangelists, was instructed by the apostle to abide at Crete, whither he had been sent to ordain elders and set things in order, until Artemas or Tychichus should be sent to supply his place. Titus, therefore, was not a settled pastor over the Cretians, but was an itinerating evangelist sent there by the apostle for a particular purpose. In the multiplication of Churches, through the abundant labours of the apostles and other inferior ministers, the apostles found themselves inadequate to the arduous duties which arose out of the increase of the Churches, and which required their personal attendance; and therefore, to supply this deficiency, they selected men from among the elders,—men who had, by their fidelity and zeal, proved themselves "worthy of double honour," on

account of having "ruled well," as their assistants in this great work; and these, as before stated, were sent, from time to time, to those places where their peculiar labours were most wanted.

3. We find the apostle Paul giving them instructions how to demean themselves in the discharge of their official duties; and, among other things, they were to set the *Churches in order, and ordain elders in every city*; but the setting the Churches in order belonged to the apostles, or to those who acted under their directions; and, therefore, inasmuch as these evangelists took the government of the Church as itinerating ministers, they must have done it as the aids of the apostles. Travelling, as they did, from city to city, and from one province to another, they were enabled, not only to preach the gospel extensively, but also to inspect all the affairs of the Church themselves, and to set *every thing in order that was wanting*.

This order of ministers bore the same relation to the primitive Church, that the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church do to

their Church. The most material difference is in the name; and certainly the mere name alters not the nature of the thing. Besides, if we consider the name according to the primitive import of the word from whence it is derived, it will be found, in many respects, truly appropriate. The word *bishop* is of Saxon origin, and signifies the same as the Greek *Επισκοπος*, namely, an *overseer*, or chief minister, one who has the inspection or direction of any thing. Nehemiah speaks of the *bishops*, or overseers of the Levites at Jerusalem, Neh. xi. 22. Uzzi had the inspection of the other Levites. The Hebrew *קִפְּדָה* *peked*, rendered in Latin *episcopus*, has the same signification. The Athenians gave this name to those who presided in their courts of justice; and the digest gives it to those magistrates who had the inspection of the bread market, and other things of that nature.*—From this accurate definition of the term, we perceive that it might with strict propriety be appropriated to any officer in the Church; and it likewise furnishes a reason why elders were indifferently called elders and over-

* See Calmet.

seers. They were called elders, because, generally speaking, they were chosen from among those deacons whose long experience and age in the work of the ministry had matured them for their office; and they were called *overseers*, because to them was committed the particular oversight of the Church. Any minister, therefore, whether deacon, elder, or evangelist, may be denominated an overseer.

It is not then the name simply after which we inquire; but it is the comparative rank they held, and the duties, which, by virtue of their office, they were called to perform. It is beneath the dignity of any subject, much more a religious controversy, to indulge in mere verbal disputations. Leaving it to those who delight more in a war of words than in the pursuit of truth, to attach what name they please to us, we shall be fully satisfied with our ministerial orders, if we can find them substantially existing in the primitive Church. And that this Church had its itinerating apostles, and superintending evangelists as their aids and successors, we have already seen; and that we have a grade of ministers in our Church which very

much resembles them, is a fact which needs but little proof to make it evident. The Methodist bishops are itinerating ministers, who travel through the whole work, and are therefore able to take an impartial and responsible oversight of the whole church, ministers and people. The primitive evangelists ordained elders in every city,—our itinerating bishops do the same. In the ordination of elders, the primitive evangelists had elders associated with them. Our bishops have them also. In this respect, then, we think we have followed the primitive model in the establishment of our ministerial orders, and in the duties attached to their office.

It is probable that one reason why this order of ministers has been so much overlooked by ecclesiastical writers, is, that while the persons spoken of in the apostolical epistles have been attentively considered, the persons writing, and the persons written to, have not been recognized in their proper character. By consulting, in particular, the Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus,

we shall find him speaking of *deacons* and *elders*, two distinct orders in the ministry; the person *speaking* is an apostle, exercising the high functions of his office over the whole church; and the persons spoken to, are evangelists, whom the apostle was training up, that they might be qualified to succeed him in his office, as well as to perform that during his lifetime, which he was not able, in consequence of an increase of his labours, to do himself. Looking at the subject in this point of light, we see rising up to our view an efficient itinerating officer, who takes a responsible oversight of the whole church.

Another very probable reason is, that the itinerating life had been so long laid aside in the church, that it seems to have been almost forgotten by those local men who have undertaken to investigate this subject.—Hence, when they have read of Timothy, Titus, and others that were called bishops, viewing them through the medium of their own church establishment, they have considered them as resembling diocesan bishops. Others, not friendly to episcopacy, have

considered those eminent men, who devoted their whole time to *spreading* the gospel, as resembling stationary pastors over single congregations. We presume both of these views are erroneous. They were neither diocesan bishops, nor stationed pastors, but were itinerating evangelists; or, if you like the term better, superintending bishops, flying at the command of him who "makes his ministers a flame of fire," "through the heavens, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those that dwell on the earth."

On this part of our subject it seems expedient to stop, to obviate an objection. It may be objected, that if the power of ordination is in the body of elders, why transfer that authority to others? Why have a superior order of ministers at all? To this it is answered, that, although the body of elders possess the right of ordaining others, and of prescribing all rules for the regulation of the Church, yet they may, if they find it convenient, delegate any part of that power to others. It would be, for instance, next to impossible for the elders, in their collective capacity, to carry their own rules into exe-

cution. Each one, in his separate capacity, in his individual pastoral charge, might indeed execute those rules, which were, from time to time, ordained by the conference of elders. And although a competent number of them might confer orders upon others, by prayer and imposition of their hands, yet this might be found, on many accounts, very inconvenient; and therefore they might have delegated that authority to others.

That this was the case appears extremely probable. We find, in the first place, that St. Paul and Barnabas were consecrated for their special work by a body of elders; and Timothy received the gift by the *laying on of the hands of the presbytery*; and yet we find Timothy and Titus were afterwards commanded by St. Paul to *ordain elders in every city*. Not that we are to conclude they did this without the suffrage and assistance of the elders. They doubtless acted conjointly.

CHAPTER IV.

No particular Form of Church Government prescribed in Scripture.

Although it appears more than probable that an episcopal government did exist in the primitive Church, yet it is somewhat difficult to determine with accuracy respecting the particular *modification* of that government; for though we admit that episcopacy did exist in the primitive Church, it does not necessarily follow that it can exist only under one form precisely. There are many forms of episcopacy in our day. The Church of England differs, in many particulars, from the Protestant Episcopal Church in these United States; and the Moravians, who also are episcopal, differ from them both. To define what powers belonged to the superior minister, and mark the lines of his powers in distinction from the powers of each inferior minister, and to show with exactitude the peculiar jurisdiction of each, as it respects their relation to each other, would, it is presumed, be not a little difficult.

Neither does it appear that any particular *form* of Church government, in distinction from all others, is essential to constitute a Christian Church; for if it were, the Holy Ghost would doubtless have left a delineation of that form in the sacred scriptures. Church government itself is, indeed, essential to the existence of a Church; but the particular *mode* of that government seems to be left to the wisdom and prudence of those men appointed to govern; and therefore the Church is at liberty to vary that mode according to circumstances; always minding, however, to keep as near as possible to apostolic order and usage.

Neither are we singular in this opinion. With whatever vehemence some have contended for their own peculiar mode of government, there have not been wanting men, eminent for their abilities, and standing high in their respective communities, who have candidly acknowledged, that no particular mode, in distinction from all others, was essentially necessary to constitute a Christian Church. Among others we reckon Stillingfleet. "I confess," says he, "the

discipline of the primitive Church hath been very much misrepresented to us, by men looking upon it through the glass of modern practices and customs among us. Whether any shall succeed the Apostles in superiority of power over presbyters, or all remain governing the Church in an equality of power, is no where determined by the will of Christ in scripture; and so not necessarily binding on Christians." He adds, "That Christ did never intend to institute any one form of government in his Church;—no one form is prescribed in scripture;—all the standing laws respecting Church government, are equally applicable to several forms. All the *laws* in scripture respecting Church government, may be referred to three heads. 1. The qualification of the persons for the office of government. 2. Such as require a right management of their office. 3. Such as *lay down rules* for the management of their office. Now, all these are equally applicable to either of the forms; and are equally required as necessary in a bishop, whether taken for one of a superior order above pres-

byters, or else only for a single presbyter.”

The same writer observes, “God, by his own laws, hath given men power and liberty to determine the particular form of Church government among them. Hence it may appear, that though one form of government be agreeable to the word, it doth not follow that another is not; or because one is lawful, another is unlawful: one form may be more agreeable to some parts, places, people, and times, than others are. In which case, that form of government is to be settled which is most agreeable to the present state of a place, and is most advantageously conducive to promoting the ends of Church government in that place or nation.” He, moreover, asserts, that “any particular form of government, agreed upon by the governors of the church, consonant to the general rules of scripture, to be of divine right. The *reason* of church government is immutable in all times and places, which is the preservation of the peace and unity of the Church; but the particular *form* of that government, the laws of God

have left to the prudence of particular churches to determine. So the same *reason* of church government may call for an equality in the persons acting as governors of the church in one place, which may call for superiority and subordination in another."

Such was the judgment of this eminent prelate of the Church of England in respect to church government. While he admitted government itself to be of divine origin, and of vital importance to the existence and prosperity of the Church, yet, with that candour and frankness of spirit which is characteristic of a great mind, he acknowledges that a diversity of forms may well comport with the designs of Christ, and the declarations of scripture on this subject. And who that maturely considers this subject, can determine otherwise? If any one particular form of church government were essential to constitute a Christian Church, is it not reasonable to suppose we should find that form most accurately described in the sacred scriptures? For certainly the Holy Ghost would not have left us in the dark with regard to a subject so

intimately connected with the salvation of men.

On a subject where we have not the unerring light of revelation, we must form our judgments from existing facts according to the best lights we have. But we have already seen that the scriptures, as well as the practice of the primitive Church, authorize the belief that there were three orders in the Christian Church, namely, deacons, presbyters or bishops, and evangelists or apostles. The deacons and presbyters were stationary, the presbyter having charge of a single congregation, to whom he administered the word and ordinances of God; the deacons at first, and afterwards, when his work enlarged, more or less of presbyters, acting under his direction as his assistants; and the evangelists, taking the general oversight of the whole, were itinerating ministers, moving from place to place, as the circumstances of the church should render expedient and necessary.

It moreover appears highly probable, that whatever authority these itinerating evange-

lists possessed, they derived it by delegation from the body of presbyters; to whom belonged the original right of modifying the government of the Church, as they saw it expedient for the benefit of the community, provided they did not transcend the bounds of their authority by transgressing a known precept of Christ. This seems necessarily to follow from the proposition already established, namely, that the original right of consecrating ministers, and of governing the church, belonged to the presbytery. If so, as it unquestionably did, then all other officers, whether superior or inferior, must have derived their authority, as well as the manner in which they were to use that authority, from the body of elders.

In every community, as well religious as civil, there must be some centre of power, some supreme authority, from whence all others must emanate. And this supreme authority may either retain its original right within itself, or may, if necessary or expedient, impart a portion of it to others, who must be responsible for its use to the authority from which it was derived. It is not al-

ways necessary, nay, it is often totally impracticable, for that body to which the power of right belongs to govern, to exercise that power. Thus, it is the inherent right of every man to govern himself. But where a number of individuals form a community, it being impracticable for each individual to exercise his own inherent right of governing himself, he resigns up a part of that right, in order to secure the good of the whole community. When this association is formed by mutual consent, and for mutual good, the right of government is transferred from each individual to the whole body. But this community itself will find it necessary to concentrate its authority in the hands of one or more persons, in order to make and execute its laws. Hence arises the necessity of representative government, by which the authority of the whole community is concentrated in the hands of a few. But even these few, although they may deliberate together, and enact laws for the regulation of the community, they cannot execute them in their collective capacity. Hence arises the necessity of a division of power into the hands of in-

dividuals, who now possess, not only their original right of governing themselves, but also, by delegation, the right of governing others; and that too, in those important points which involve the dearest interests of mankind: I allude to governors, judges, &c. This kind of apportionment of power originates of necessity from the present state of human society. Society cannot exist without it. Every man must resign some portion of his individual rights, in order to secure those which he retains,—otherwise he must be deprived of the whole.

But these observations apply principally to the regulation of civil society. Here all power is derived primarily from the people, who were created by God; and they have the right of modifying, and of apportioning that power, as the state of society, and the exigencies of time and place, may require. And all good and wise legislators will be actuated with a view to the good of the whole community. But the government of the church of God is somewhat different. God calls men, whom He pleases, to be the ministers of his word. And as an individual man

possesses the right of governing himself in all secular matters, until the state of society shall dictate the necessity, from an intercommunity of interests, of surrendering a part of that right into the hands of others, so those ministers whom God selects to be the shepherds of His flock, and the guardians of His people, possess the right of governing themselves in religious matters, and all those committed to their care. St. Paul says to the elders of the church of Ephesus, “over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” Ministers primarily derive their authority to preach, and to exercise their ministerial functions, among which is the oversight of the church, from Jesus Christ himself. This is the supreme fountain of their authority; and of this authority no man, nor number of men, have a right to dispossess them: that is, while they maintain the character of true ministers of Jesus Christ. But if they cease to be what they were when called of God to be ministers, either by neglecting their duty, abusing their authority, or by apostacy from the faith, they may and ought to be deprived of their authority. Mi-

nisters receive authority from Jesus Christ for the "salvation, and not for the destruction" of souls.

This authority we have seen is deposited by the Holy Ghost in the hands of the elders of the Church.

They are, indeed, commanded not to "lord it over God's heritage, but be ensamples to the flock." Though they possess the right of governing, they have no right to tyrannize, or to usurp a despotic power over the consciences, or the property of the people. Their authority has its limits, over which they have no right to leap. But while they keep within the limits prescribed them by Jesus Christ, they have the right of modifying that power committed to them, and of apportioning it among the several officers of the Church, as time, place, and circumstance may require. They are no more under the necessity of retaining it all in their own hands, because originally confided to their trust, than the people were to retain their civil power in their own hands, because it originally belonged to them. Nay, in many

cases it would be equally inconvenient, and equally dangerous.

This point being established, we will now inquire a little more particularly into the order of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and see whether, in this branch of it, it is in conformity to the scriptural views we have taken of the primitive Church. We have already observed, that the first officers of this Church were consecrated by a body of presbyters of the Church of England. And in doing this, Mr. Wesley, and those presbyters associated with him, did nothing more than those elders did who ordained St. Paul. This Apostle was ordained, and then *they*, those who ordained him, sent him and Barnabas *away* to preach the gospel, and to establish churches in foreign lands, among the Gentiles. Mr. Wesley, and the other presbyters, ordained Dr. Coke, and sent him away to preach the gospel, and to establish churches in foreign lands, namely, among the Americans. In this act, no doubt but Mr. Wesley had his eye upon the practice of the primitive Church, and, as he has informed us, particularly upon the Church of Alexandria, whose

presbyters consecrated a superior minister. Conceiving, however, that the episcopal mode of church government, if modified according to the apostolic form, with an itinerating superintendency at its head, was best adapted to the state of society, and best calculated to spread the gospel extensively, Mr. Wesley adopted this mode in preference to any other. Now, even allowing that there is no express warrant from scripture for this mode of church government, he was perfectly justifiable in adopting it, according to the views which Stillingfleet and others have taken of the subject, namely, that the Church is at liberty to adopt that mode, if they do not transgress an express precept of Christ, which may be considered best adapted to secure the ends of Church government. If no particular form is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures, and an itinerating superintendency is not condemned there, then no one has a right to condemn Mr. Wesley for adopting the one he did.— But, from the view we have already taken of the ministry in the apostles' days, we have satisfactory assurance that an itinerating su-

perintendency did then exist; and that this superintendency extended its influence over the whole body of the church, presbyters, deacons, and people; and that the features of Church government in that day were, in no essential points, dissimilar to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

We have our itinerating superintendency, which derives its authority from, and is responsible to, the body of elders, who claim the right of regulating the affairs of the church. It is well known to all who are acquainted with our economy, that the whole power of the church is vested in a general conference, which is composed of a select body of elders chosen by each annual conference, who have the sole right of making rules for the government of the church; of regulating every thing, whether relating to the general superintendency of itinerating bishops, or to the more particular duties of elders and deacons. And to this body the whole ministry, however diversified in its operations, is responsible.

Now let the Methodist Episcopal Church be candidly viewed through this medium,

and then see whether there is any just cause for calling in question the legality of its ministry, or the validity of its ordinances. Called of God, as this ministry evidently has been, like the primitive evangelists and preachers, they went out in his name, and were made successful in raising those *who were no people to become the people of God*. And after having thus demonstrated the divinity of their mission, in the awakening and conversion of souls, have they not a right to govern those who have been thus given to them as the fruits of their ministry? Let those who call this right in question, if they are able, produce a better.

CHAPTER V.

Of the Declension of the Itinerating Ministry.

Those who have examined the annals of the Church are apprized of the lamentable departure from primitive purity, and from apostolic labours and sufferings, which were witnessed soon after the decease of the apostles. Indeed, the apostle Paul himself complained, that "all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ." No sooner did

the bodies of these venerable men of God sleep in the grave, than their followers began to abate somewhat of their labours in the service of God. In process of time their immediate successors in the ministry, the itinerating evangelists, also departed to their God, and left the waring Church in other, and less energetic hands : and though among these there were many *burning and shining lights*, who strove to fan the flame of apostolic zeal, yet in many it burnt but dimly; until finally that peculiar blaze which shone in the life and preaching of those luminous and moving stars of the church, who had now disappeared from this lower hemisphere, became entirely extinguished. Instead of that energetic superintendency which produced such astonishing and blessed effects, by the preaching of the itinerating apostles and evangelists, we behold a ministry gradually sinking into locality, and whose feeble efforts could no longer withstand that spirit of lukewarmness and worldly-mindedness which now began to pervade the church.

If we study the nature of man, it will not

be difficult to ascertain the reason why those itinerating evangelists did not continue to exist in their original character. As the churches multiplied, and wealth increased, they might have supposed, being aided in the conclusion by that predisposition to ease and self-indulgence so natural to men, that those privations connected with an itinerating life, were no longer necessary for the good of the church. Hence they gradually restricted their ministerial labours, becoming more and more local, until finally the itinerating superintendency was exchanged for that located episcopacy which was more congenial to the natural propensities of human nature. From these circumstances, which, to human appearance, seemed innocently enough to grow out of the state of society, the *name* evangelist expired with the character it originally represented; and the term bishop or overseer, which was formerly appropriated to the pastor of a single congregation, was now given to those who took the rank, without doing the labour in the church, formerly held by the apostles and itinerating evangelists.

From this inauspicious period of the sad declension of ministerial sufferings and labour, commenced that kind of episcopal jurisdiction, which extended to those places which were never personally visited by an episcopal character; and it gradually swelled until it overflowed the bounds which the Holy Scriptures had set to it. It is hardly necessary to observe, that from these small beginnings, and this gradual augmentation of episcopal powers, grew that frightful authority which was finally concentrated in the pontiff of the Romish Church. So dangerous it is to depart, in the smallest degree, from the simplicity and purity of primitive Christianity. When once the mind of man, ever fruitful in experiments, especially when they flatter his pride and ambition, breaks loose from the restraints of scripture authority, one cannot tell where it will stop.

Another cause operated to produce the same result. Those stationary presbyters, as the people of their charge multiplied, began to enlarge the boundaries of their pastoral jurisdiction; and though, at first, they were principally confined to cities, as their

work enlarged, they afterwards, and very properly too, extended their ministerial labours to country villages and towns; and by thus increasing the number of their converts, they increased the duties of their office; and from this continual increase of converts, new congregations were formed, which required the labour of additional ministers. These additional ministers, taking the oversight of congregations sometimes at a considerable distance from the larger towns and cities, were under the necessity of forming distinct churches, and of erecting separate altars independent of their neighbours; but the reverence which these newly formed congregations would naturally feel for those venerable men who had lived, if not with, yet near the apostles, and who had been the primary instruments of collecting them together, would lead them to pay great deference to their judgment, and induce them to consult them on all matters of importance; “and perhaps some desire of influence and dominion, from which the hearts of good men might not be always free,”* contributed to lay a

* See Buck's Theological Dictionary, art. *Episcopacy*.

foundation for an unscriptural subordination among the ministers and people of these new churches, until it arose to that superiority of dominion which marked the rise of *the man of sin*. All this seems natural. And it cannot be denied but that this desire of having a lordly influence over others, manifested itself at an early period of the Christian Church; and indeed it was one of the many evils complained of, even in the days of the apostles. This principle exists more or less in most men, and especially in those who are not entirely sanctified by grace.

CHAPTER VI.

The Manner in which the Methodist Episcopal Church was constituted.

Having made these observations on the declension of the ministerial character, from that vigorous exertion in the cause of Christ, which so eminently distinguished the primitive evangelists, I proceed to remark, that this order of ministers did not arise again in their original character, until that bright luminary of the church arose, the REV. JOHN

WESLEY.* With him revived the ancient spirit of the primitive evangelists; and success, unequalled in modern times, attended his astonishing labours. The Christian world was aroused from that spiritual lethargy and that supineness in the things of God, under which it had long slumbered. Like the first ministers of the Lord Jesus, this flaming herald of salvation, went every where preaching the word; and wherever he went the multitudes who waited on his ministry were excited to attend to the things which make

* It is by no means intended by this remark to say that, from the time of the declension alluded to, there were no true ministers of Jesus Christ, until John Wesley arose. Doubtless there always have been more or less in the church. Those who arose in the memorable era of the reformation are well known. The glorious effects of the labours of Wickliffe in England, of Luther in Germany, of Huss and Jerome in Holland, of Knox in Scotland, and that cluster of excellent men who withstood the usurpations of the Romish Church in England, when that kingdom emancipated itself from the tyranny of that antichristian Church, will never be forgotten. But though these bold champions for truth, wrought faithfully in its sacred cause, none of them were regular itinerants themselves, nor did they establish a travelling ministry. This is what is meant when it is said the spirit of the ancient evangelists revived with the Rev. J. Wesley. Neither would we overlook that bright luminary of the church, George Whitefield, whose itinerating labours were rendered a blessing to thousands of precious souls.

for their everlasting peace. And finding, after making diligent search into the records of the church, that he was moving in the circle formerly drawn by the apostles and evangelists; also witnessing the beneficial results to the souls of men by this method of preaching the gospel; when the time drew nigh for him to take his departure to his God, he adopted measures to secure a succession of itinerating evangelists over the church which God had made him instrumental in planting. And in this church, we recognize to the present day, the practice of those ancient evangelists exemplified in the life and labour of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church. May the great Head of the church strengthen them for their work.

But the grand objection urged against the conduct of Mr. Wesley, in reference to the subject more immediately under consideration, is, "That he introduced into the ministry lay preachers, as they have not been unaptly called; thereby sanctioning a practice not approved by the church of which he always acknowledged himself a member; and finally proceeded to lay his hands on some of them, for which work he was not duly au-

thorized." To the latter part of this objection we have already answered. To the former member of it, we might answer simply by referring to the first establishment of the Christian Church. Did our Lord go to the Jewish Sanhedrim, or to the order of priests or Levites, to choose men for his apostles and preachers? This question must be answered in the negative. Well, did the apostles, after the ascension of Jesus Christ, confine themselves to the order of the priesthood for men who were to assist and succeed them in the ministry? Certainly not. The fact is, they gave the right hand of fellowship to those men who had been converted to God by the ministry of truth, and who were presented to them in the course of God's providence, as having been designated by the Holy Ghost, as ministers of the word.— So far were they from selecting men who had been previously educated for that purpose, that they only accepted of such as were called of Jesus Christ, and had given evidence of their call by their works of faith and labours of love, as well as by an im-

provement of their gifts and ministerial usefulness. These were the men that stepped into the work of God in the golden days of the church. The great curse of the church has ever been the introducing of worldly-minded men into the ministry, who had no other qualification for their office than human erudition, and the appointment of men. Had the ministry been sacredly guarded, as it ought to have been, from the intrusion of unhallowed men into the sacred office, Methodism, as such, would never have been known. Reformations, indeed, had, at different periods, been effected; but declensions had so soon succeeded them, that pure religion was rarely to be found either among the clergy or laity, at the time Mr. Wesley commenced his successful ministerial career.

In this respect also, there is a remarkable coincidence between Methodism and primitive Christianity. The men who were employed as his assistants in carrying on the glorious work, were not sought after by Mr. Wesley, but they were presented to him as the fruits of his ministry; as men in whom

dwelt the love of God, and who were called by the Holy Ghost to the help of the Lord against the mighty. They proved themselves to be men eminent for piety and for ministerial gifts. As the great work of reformation increased, these men, without any previous design of Mr. Wesley, came forward as distinguished instruments in the hands of God, as assistants to him in carrying forward the great work in which he was engaged. Like unto the primitive preachers, though they proved themselves able ministers of the New Testament, they had not been selected by the appointment of men to the work of the ministry; and Mr. Wesley submitted, with great reluctance, to this innovation upon the established order of the church of which he was a member; nothing indeed, but an irresistible conviction that it was according to the order of God, induced him to submit to be thus vile in the sight of men.

Some of these missionaries of the cross, moved by the Holy Ghost, came to this country. Proclaiming unto the inhabitants

of America, the unsearchable riches of Christ, both in the cities and country villages, they rejoiced to witness the manifestations of God's power in the awakening and conversion of souls. The weeping multitudes who attended their ministrations, evinced their convictions that these men were the *servants of the most high God, who shewed unto them the way of salvation*. From among those who gave evidence of their conversion to God, societies were formed. And out of these were men raised up, who testified by word and deed, that they were called of God to instruct their brethren, and to call sinners to repentance. But neither were these men called from among the regular Clergy, and therefore had never been set apart by prayer and imposition of hands to the office of ministers : but they acted, nevertheless, under a conviction that consecration, in some form, was necessary to qualify them to administer the ordinances of baptism and the holy eucharist. These sacraments, therefore, though they believed them of divine appointment, they did not feel themselves duly authorized to administer ; although the people who

had been converted under their ministry, were very desirous of receiving them from their hands. Mr. Francis Asbury, who was among the first who visited this country in the character of a Methodist missionary, and who had laboured with indefatigable zeal, and great success, as an itinerating evangelist, was frequently solicited to devise some means whereby the people could be furnished with the ordinances of God's house. But having never been consecrated himself, and scrupulously adhering to the doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, that an unconsecrated minister, however well he might be otherwise qualified to preach, had no authority, either to ordain others, or to administer the ordinances himself, utterly refused to hearken to the solicitations of the people, until he should receive the proper authority in a regular way.

In this state of affairs, he wrote to Mr. Wesley, laying before that apostolic man, the condition in which the societies were, in reference to this subject, in this country. Mr. Wesley heard their complaints with all

the tender solicitude of a spiritual father.— For some time he hesitated. His mind hung in suspense between inclination and duty. His inclination led him to refuse, for the sake of peace; for he did not wish to offend against the order of the church to which he belonged. A sense of duty urged him to comply for the sake of immortal souls, thousands of whom were now looking to him as the grand instrument of their salvation, for his counsel and aid in this affair. We are not, however, to suppose that his hesitancy in proceeding to organize a separate church on this side the Atlantic, arose from any scruples he entertained respecting the *lawfulness* or expediency of the undertaking upon evangelical principles; but merely because the practice was not sanctioned by the canons of the English Church, of which he always acknowledged himself a member. Mr. Wesley was well acquainted with ecclesiastical history. He had impartially studied the primitive Church; and was also fully acquainted with the various church establishments, among the Protestants; and from a thorough

knowledge, ascertained by a diligent search into the records of the Church, of all that belonged to the rites and canons of the Christian Church, he had been long convinced, that the original right of conferring orders upon ministers, otherwise accredited of God, belonged to the body of elders. In his Journal, January 20, 1746, he says, "I read over Lord King's account of the primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe, that this was a fair and impartial draught. But if so, it would follow, that bishops and presbyters are essentially of one order; and that originally every Christian congregation was a church independent on all others." Vol. ii. of his works, page 332. In Vol. xvi. page 26. he observes, "As to my own judgment, I still believe the episcopal form of church government to be scriptural and apostolical. I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the apostles. But that it is *prescribed* in scripture, I do not believe. This opinion, which I once zealously espoused, I have been heartily ashamed of ever since I read Bishop Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*. I think he has unanswerably proved, that neither

Christ nor his apostles *prescribe* any particular form of Church government, and that the plea of *divine right* for diocesan episcopacy, was never heard of in the primitive Church."

In page 35 of the same volume, he makes the following remarks in reference to the same subject. "Concerning *Diocesan Episcopacy*, there are several questions I should be glad to have answered. 1. Where is it *prescribed* in scripture? 2. How does it appear that the apostles settled it in all the churches they planted? 3. How does it appear that they so settled it in any, as to make it of perpetual obligation? It is allowed Christ and his apostles did put the churches under some form of government or other. But, 1. Did they put all churches under the same precise form? If they did, 2. Can we prove this to have been the very same which now remains in the Church of England?"

From these quotations it will appear evident, that whether Mr. Wesley was right or wrong in his opinion, he acted from the clearest dictates of his judgment; and a judgment too, made up from an accurate investigation of this subject. While he believed an

episcopal form of Church government agreed well with the writings and practice of the apostles, he did not believe that any particular form, and especially the one recognized by the Church of England, was any where *prescribed* in the sacred scriptures. In this frank confession, which was made long before he laid hands upon Dr. Coke, he certainly demonstrated an impartial regard to truth; for it was in direct contradiction to the views he had received by education, and which led him at one time to suppose that it would be almost a sin to save souls out of the established church. In this instance Mr. Wesley evinced a trait of character, by which he was distinguished in all his proceedings, namely, a disposition to yield to the dominion of truth, however contrary it might be to his preconceived opinions.

These, then, were his views, and this was the state of his mind, when solicited to interpose in behalf of the Methodist Societies in America. And in this suspense he remained until the conclusion of the American war. On the acknowledgment of the independence of these United States, they became

separated from Great Britain, not only in a civil, but also in an ecclesiastical point of view. This event, and the known solicitations of the people on this vast continent, which arose from their being destitute of the ordinances of the Church, tended to remove those scruples of Mr. Wesley, which, as we have already seen, arose merely from prudential considerations. He therefore felt himself at perfect liberty to follow the dictates of his judgment, and to furnish, according to the primitive model, these wandering sheep in the wilderness, with accredited pastors, who should administer to them the bread of life. Accordingly he drew up a short plan of Church government, and being assisted by other presbyters of the Church of England, he solemnly set apart Thomas Coke, L.L. D. as superintendent of the Methodist Societies in America; and furnished him with letters of ordination, and with instructions to consecrate such other preachers in the United States, as should be approved of by the conference of preachers.

As this is an important era of the Methodist Church, I think it expedient to lay

the whole subject before the reader. Of the letters of ordination, "the following," says Mr. Drew, in his life of Dr. Coke, page 65, "is a faithful copy, carefully transcribed from the original in Mr. Wesley's own handwriting, preserved among the papers of the late Dr. Coke :—

"To all to whom these presents shall come, John Wesley, late Fellow of Lincoln College, in Oxford, Presbyter of the Church of England, sendeth greeting :

"Whereas many of the people in the southern provinces of North America, who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the same church, and whereas there does not appear to be any other way of supplying them with ministers;

Know all men, that I, *John Wesley*, think myself to be providentially called at this time to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America. And, therefore, under

the protection of Almighty God, and with a single eye to his glory, I have this day set apart as a superintendent, by the imposition of my hands, and prayer, (being assisted by other ordained ministers,) Thomas Coke, Dr. of Civil Law, a Presbyterian of the Church of England, and a man whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work. And I do hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern, as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ. In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four.

“JOHN WESLEY.”

Mr. Wesley also wrote the following letter, which Dr. Coke was directed to print and circulate among the societies on his arrival in America :—

“*Bristol, September 10, 1784.*”

“To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our brethren in North America.

“By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces in North America are totally disjoined from the mother

country, and erected into independent states. The English government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the provincial assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice and in compliance with their desire I have drawn up a little sketch. Lord King's account of the primitive Church convinced me many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our travelling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace sake, but because I was determined, as little as possible, to violate the established order of the national church to which I belonged.

“ But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction.—

In America there are none, neither any parish minister. So that for some hundreds of miles together, there is none either to baptize, or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.

“ I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America; as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England, (I think the best constituted national church in the world,) which I advise all the travelling preachers to use on the Lord's day in all the congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the supper of the Lord, on every Lord's day.

“ If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding these poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

“ It has indeed been proposed to desire the English bishops to ordain part of our preachers for America. But to this I object, 1. I desired the Bishop of London to ordain one, but could not prevail. 2. If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. 3. If they were to ordain them now, they would expect to govern them. And how grievously would this entangle us! 4. As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty, where-with God has so strangely made them free.

“ JOHN WESLEY.”

These documents and extracts are not in-

troduced by way of argument to prove the validity of the orders conferred upon Dr. Coke and others; but simply for the purpose of showing the views under which Mr. Wesley acted; and to evince the purity of his motives, as well as the calmness and deliberation with which he proceeded in this, as he did in all the other public acts of his most useful life. The authority on which he acted in reference to this subject, rests upon an immoveable basis, as has been already proved from scripture and the usages of the primitive Church.

Another object in introducing these documents to the reader's notice, is, that, if not correctly informed already, he may hereby have correct information in respect to the manner in which the Methodist Episcopal Church was first constituted and established. And that the whole subject may be before him, it may be expedient to make a few observations upon the manner in which Dr. Coke proceeded to execute his high and important trust after his arrival in America.—Passing over those incidents which occurred

on his first arrival on this western continent, the pleasing and affectionate interview with the venerable Asbury, who had waited with anxious solicitude his coming, and who met him in a chapel erected in a forest in Delaware State, I proceed to remark, that, after unfolding the plan, the execution of which was intrusted to Dr. Coke by Mr. Wesley, it was unanimously agreed by those preachers present, to assemble a general conference, with all convenient despatch. This was accordingly done. The conference was opened on Christmas eve, in the city of Baltimore, in the year 1784. Although the whole number of preachers at that time amounted to eighty-one, only sixty were assembled, owing, most probably, to the shortness of the notice, and the difficulty of communicating intelligence of the contemplated arrangement, over such a vast tract of territory. In this assembly the plans for the future government of the Methodist Societies in America, were fully unfolded to the preachers; and their general principles were received very unanimously.

Mr. Francis Asbury, who had continued

his ministerial labours in America, even during the revolutionary struggle, and had, by his Christian and dignified deportment, rendered himself exceedingly dear to the preachers and societies in the United States, was selected by Mr. Wesley to be ordained joint superintendent or bishop, with Dr. Coke; and although, according to the existing rules of the societies, this designation had been sufficient for his acceptance, and a sufficient warrant for Dr. Coke to consecrate him, Mr. Asbury prudently withheld his consent until it was obtained by the suffrages of the preachers then present, who all declared in his favour. Thus did this venerable man of God, whom we consider the apostle of America, signify his willingness to be servant of all.

If any are disposed to call in question the validity of his appointment to his peculiar work, let them recollect that he possessed every requisite qualification for so high an office and dignity in the church. He had given evidence of his spiritual regeneration in early life. And before he left his native country, he evinced that ardour of devotion.

that uprightness of character and conduct, and those ministerial qualifications, which recommended him to the confidence of all who knew him, and especially of those preachers in connexion with Mr. Wesley, who knew him best. While labouring with great zeal and usefulness in the work of the ministry in his own land, he felt a desire arise in his heart to visit America. This desire he made known to Mr. Wesley, and others of his brethren; and conceiving him well qualified for the undertaking, and that his impressions were from God, he was advised to embark for this country.

On his arrival here, he immediately entered upon his labours, moving from city to city, and from place to place, wherever he could find people willing to hear the word. His great soul, burning with love to God and man, would not be confined to a narrow circle. He saw large fields before him, white and ready to harvest, and into these fields he entered and laboured assiduously, using every mean in his power to gather the wheat into the garner. His journal will show the difficulties he encountered, and thousands of

living witnesses can testify to the extent and success of his ministerial career. While all those who came from England as missionaries to this country, returned to their native land, at the commencement of the revolutionary war, this man of God stood his ground in the midst of perils and persecutions, out-rode the storm, continuing to guide the ship until the calm of political tranquillity presented a smoother sea, which enabled him to moor his ship in a safe and secure harbour.— During these sufferings and labours, he exhibited all those great talents, which qualify a man for a Christian bishop. His piety was unquestionable, his ministerial talents and fidelity were visible to all, and his success in the application of them, was equally conspicuous. He did, indeed, *the work of an evangelist.*

This was the man selected by Mr. Wesley, and unanimously chosen by the preachers in America, to be bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. How far he answered the expectations of his friends in filling his elevated and responsible office, all the subse-

quent acts of his life will fully demonstrate. In him revived the spirit and practice of the ancient itinerating evangelists, in this country. And when Dr. Coke, and those who assisted in the ceremony, laid hands on him, they no doubt obeyed the command of the Holy Ghost, who said, "Separate to me" Francis Asbury "for the work whereunto I have called him." He certainly gave every evidence which could reasonably be expected any human being could give, of his call to his peculiar work. He had, for a number of years, not only preached, but also "ruled well," and thereby had "purchased to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith."

From this view of the subject, therefore, we think we can furnish substantial proof of our conformity to the requirements of the gospel, respecting the call and qualification of our first ministers.

CHAPTER VII.

An Argument from Necessity.

Notwithstanding all that has been said upon this subject, the conduct of Messrs. Wesley,

Coke, and Asbury, cannot be justified, unless it shall appear that there was a *necessity* from the moral state of society, for these proceedings; for no man can be justified in doing an *unnecessary* work. But if it be found that the state of society was such as to demand the measures which were pursued in the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church, whatever may be urged against them will lose all its force, if those measures are, at the same time, sanctioned by the word of God; for even the *necessity* of a reformation will not warrant a departure from scripture authority, in the means selected to bring it about. We have already seen what those means were, used by Mr. Wesley and his colleagues to effect a separate Church establishment in America. Let us now inquire whether there was a *necessity* for such a step to be taken.

That the state of religious society was such in Great Britain, as to demand mighty exertions in order to effect a reformation, will not, I presume, be disputed by those who have studied the history of those times.

Both clergy and laity, to say no more, were generally sunk into a state of great lukewarmness; and had departed in spirit and practice from the doctrines and precepts of their own church. To be convinced of this, we need only consult *Wesley's* "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," and *Simpson's* "Plea for Religion." To say nothing of the morals of the people in general, were not the grand distinguishing doctrines of the gospel mostly lost sight of, especially the doctrine of "justification by faith alone?" The poor especially, who always form the greatest proportion of society, were not only neglected as it respects religion, but their education was entirely overlooked; and as a necessary consequence, they were generally sunk to the lowest state of moral degradation.

To call back the clergy to the spirit and practice of the Church to which they belonged, and to revive true religion in the nation, was what Mr. Wesley aimed at.—Having been made a partaker of the new birth himself, he ardently pressed the necessity of it upon others. And in consequence

of his pointed appeals to the consciences of the people in his public addresses, the boldness with which he reproved the vices of the age, and his unwearied zeal in proclaiming the distinguishing doctrines of Christ, particularly justification by faith, he gave such offence to the dignitaries of the church, and others, that first one, then another, and finally almost all the churches were closed against him. But let it be recollected, that their opposition was not because he introduced any doctrine repugnant, either to the scriptures or to the articles of his church. So far from this, that he constantly appealed, not only to the sacred scriptures in proof of his doctrine, but also to the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the Church of England. This determined opposition, therefore, arose from another cause. The fact is, the greatmajority of the clergy, and of consequence, (according to the old adage, "Like priest like people,") the laity had departed from the articles of their own church. not indeed, in a formal manner, but in spirit and practice. Accordingly they rose in opposition to the man who attempted to reprove them for their

defection from their own standards of faith and practice, and to press upon them the necessity of returning unto them.

This single circumstance shows the necessity of the steps taken by Mr. Wesley. After using every prudent method in his power to bring his brethren of the clergy to a sense of their duty, and failing of success, he turned his attention to the common people, many of whom "heard him gladly." But being refused the use of the churches, he was under the necessity of proclaiming the gospel in the open fields; for a dispensation of the gospel was committed to him, and he dared not hold his peace. The success, unparalleled since the apostles' days, which every where attended his ministry, made it necessary for him to make some provision for their preservation in the grace of God. They could not assemble in the open air at all seasons of the year, and they soon became too numerous to be accommodated in private houses:—hence arose the necessity of erecting houses of worship in which the people might assemble to hear the word, and edify each other.—This was one of the irregularities of which

he has been accused; and this arose from necessity. Thus, it was necessary the people should be reformed, or lost for ever. This must be done through the ministry of the word; but Mr. Wesley was denied the use of those houses consecrated for that purpose; he was under the necessity, therefore, of going into the fields. But this practice could not be universally adopted, and neither could private houses accommodate the multitudes who flocked to hear : hence arose the necessity of building separate houses of worship.

But the people soon so multiplied, that additional pastors were needed, in order to provide them with spiritual food. The regular clergy, so far from administering to their spiritual wants, frequently drove them from the Lord's table, and persecuted them and their leader, in a variety of ways.—These, therefore, could not afford that additional help which was so much needed. In this situation, men were raised up, without any forethought, and, indeed, entirely contrary to the wish and design of Mr. Wesley,

from among his societies, possessed of those gifts and graces, which qualified them to instruct and build up their brethren in faith and love. This help, after overcoming the prejudice he had against it, Mr. Wesley accepted, as coming directly in the order of God's providence. This irregularity, as it has been called, arose also from necessity. The souls converted to God by the ministry of Mr. Wesley must be fed with the sincere milk of the word. One minister, though in "labours more abundant," as Mr. W. evidently was, could by no means supply them all. Most of the clergy who had been set apart in the ordinary way for the purpose of ministering in sacred things, would not do their duty; accordingly God raised up, in this extraordinary way, for the people, "pastors after his own heart." The state of society, therefore, demanded this departure from the established order of things, in order to save souls from death. On the principle of necessity, then, Mr. Wesley was justified in yielding to those measures, which God, in his wise government, seems to have appointed for the salvation of souls.

But all this applies only to the system of things established in Great Britain. Let us, therefore, now inquire, whether the argument will not apply with equal, if not superior force, to the establishment of the church in these United States.

In respect to the *necessity* of a reformation among the people generally, in order to bring them to the enjoyment of real religion, and thereby save them from destruction, it will be allowed by all who estimate the value of immortal souls as they ought; for experimental godliness was almost a stranger among the people, especially in the middle and southern States, when the Methodist missionaries first visited this country. If it be necessary, therefore, for sleepy sinners to be aroused from their spiritual slumbers, and to be brought to the knowledge of the truth in order to their salvation, it was necessary for some more energetic method of preaching the gospel to be adopted, than was in use, in this country, sixty years ago. But on this part of the subject there can, I presume, be but one opinion. All must admit the destitute state of many parts of our

country in respect to the stated means of grace, however they may be disposed to question the orthodoxy of our sentiments, or the validity of our ordination. It is equally manifest, I believe, that through the labours of the Methodist missionaries a very general reformation in the moral conduct of the people has been effected. Tens of thousands, through their instrumentality, have been raised from the lapse of sin and moral wretchedness, to the favour of God, and to a state of moral rectitude. The dying testimony of thousands, who have gone to the other world with shouts of triumph, might be adduced in favour of the blessed effects of that gospel which was preached by the Wesleyan Methodist preachers.

Now the people thus awakened, and converted, and collected together into societies, believed, both preachers and people, in the divine authority of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper; but they were, generally speaking, equally tenacious of the sacred order of the ministry, firmly believing that, to be fully authorized to ad-

minister those ordinances, men must be set apart by prayer and imposition of hands.— Neither were the people willing to receive the ordinances from the hands of those ministers, who did not exhibit the marks of genuine ministers of Christ : they wished to receive them from those men who had been *made the sweet savour of Christ unto them.*

Indeed, with few exceptions, the Methodists met with similar treatment in this country, to what they did in Europe. Their principles were misrepresented by many, misunderstood by others, and the propagators of them were treated as heretics, who only deceived the people for gain, or some more unworthy motive. Under these circumstances, it is not to be expected that other ministers could with much cordiality, receive them to their communion, or perform the rite of baptism for them. That some degree of *necessity* arose out of this state of things, to make suitable provision to afford a supply of the ordinances to the many converted under the Methodist ministry, I think cannot be reasonably denied. And that the state of the case would have justifi-

ed even a farther deviation from what some consider the ordinary method of authorizing ministers to discharge the peculiar functions of their office, might be easily shown, even from episcopal writers themselves.

The fact is here assumed as incontrovertible, that in various parts of our country, particularly to the south, where our preachers, at that time, principally laboured, the people could not obtain the ordinances of the church from ordained clergymen. It is true, that in a few, very few instances, some clergymen did come forward, and patronized the preachers, and administered the ordinances to their people; but these godly men had their own flocks to attend upon, and therefore could not devote their time to follow an itinerant preacher around his circuit to baptize the children, &c.

Now, if such were the circumstances of the people, that they could not be supplied with the ordinances as things then were, and if it were right and necessary for them to have the sacraments, then it was certainly necessary that some suitable method should be adopted to furnish the people with them.

In this view of the subject, the argument in favour of the Methodist episcopacy, drawn from necessity, acquires irresistible force. To say that it was right they should have the ordinances, and then to say that means should not be used to supply them, is extremely absurd. We grant, indeed, that necessity will not justify any procedure inconsistent with, or contrary to, the precepts of Christ; but we plead that those precepts do admit of a departure from the ordinary method, in cases of necessity.

In the present instance, however, we do not feel ourselves driven to press this argument to that extent which a cause of urgent necessity might authorize; because, in the establishment of our church, we contend, and we think, that, in the preceding part of this Essay we have given sufficient reason for our opinion, that there was no departure from the example of the primitive Church. On the contrary, we think those who set up exclusive claims for an authorized ministry, on account of their having received it down by a regular succession from the apostles, by diocesan bishops, sa-

perior to elders, and have established an episcopacy entirely local, not only acted without authority, but have obviously departed from the usages of the primitive Church. This argument, we believe, could be brought to bear with no small weight upon them—but we forbear, because it is not so much our wish to proclaim war upon others, as it is to defend ourselves. If those who thus unwarrantably assume to themselves the only legitimate authority to consecrate ministers, and to administer the ordinances of the gospel, will present us with a regular list of bishops, resembling those now existing in their church, who have always held the same rank, and performed the same duties, from either the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, or Constantinople, we will then review our ground. Until this is done, and we believe it never will be, we shall rest contented with our present church establishment.

CHAPTER VIII.

Classical Learning not essential to a Gospel Minister.

It has frequently been objected to the Methodist ministry, that, being illiterate, they were destitute of those qualifications essential to gospel ministers. It is granted, indeed, that this ministry lays no claim to what is generally called learning. Very few of them have had the advantage of a liberal or college education. But with whatever force this objection may be urged against the generality of the Methodist preachers, it cannot be brought against the founders of our Church. Mr. Wesley stands unrivalled in the republic of letters. To a critical knowledge of the languages, he added a profound knowledge of science in general, and of theology in particular. And certainly no man had greater opportunities of forming an accurate acquaintance of human nature, from actual observation, than he. Dr. Coke was also a man of erudition. And though Bishop Asbury was not regularly educated in college, such was his taste for sound learning, and his

indefatigable industry in the application of his mind to useful study, and especially to all those subjects which had any connexion with his duty as a Christian, as an ordinary or extraordinary minister of Jesus Christ, that he never was ashamed to lift up his head either in public or private. This objection, therefore, cannot lie against the validity of our orders ; for those who conferred them possessed this qualification also. And though we wish ever highly to appreciate learning, those men of God possessed that which infinitely transcends all merely human attainments—I mean, the knowledge and love of God. They had drank deep into the fountain of divine mercy, and were *anointed with the unction of the Holy One* to preach the gospel. The sacred truths of the gospel had been sealed to their consciences by the Holy Ghost. This we consider essential to every gospel minister.

Those who take apostolic usage for their authority in church affairs, will not contend that a regular college education is essential to a minister of Jesus Christ; because it is

well known that the first ministers called by Him, were not thus qualified. When they spoke, they were recognized as “unlearned and ignorant men.” St. Paul indeed was a learned man. But, although he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and was taught according to the perfect law of his forefathers, this by no means qualified him for the work of the ministry. Before his call to this sacred work, he was smitten to the earth by the convicting voice of God, passed through the pangs of the new birth, arose, and “was baptized, washing away his sins;” and then the Lord said unto him, “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.” Acts xxvi. 16. To this important event he no doubt alludes, when, speaking of his divine call to the apostleship, he says,—“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen.” Gal. i. 15, 16.

Here is the legitimate source from whence every true minister derives his authority.— Indeed, all of whom we have any account respecting their call to the work of the ministry, speak of some such revelation of the will of God to their hearts. So Isaiah, previous to his call to the prophetic office, relates, in the most sublime strains, the view he had of God, and of himself, Chap. vi.

No human science, or human attainments whatever, however elevated the character may be, can supersede the necessity of this work of grace upon the heart, and this divine call by the Holy Ghost; for “the priest’s lips should” not only “keep knowledge, but he should receive the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” Mal. ii. 7. “No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” Heb. v. 4.

Having made these observations upon the necessity of an experimental acquaintance with the doctrines of the gospel, and of an inward call by the Holy Spirit to the work of the ministry, we are prepared to say, that

whatever of human science such a man may have, it is of great use in the discharge of his ministerial duties. And neither is the Methodist Episcopal Church inattentive to the education of her ministers. Other methods may be adopted for the attainment of science, besides going through a regular course of studies in colleges, or being taught in theological seminaries. While we are willing to allow to those who have had these advantages, if they be otherwise qualified,*

* "I venerate the man, whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine, and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause.
To such I render more than mere respect,
Whose actions say, that they respect themselves.
But loose in morals, and in manners vain,
In conversation frivolous, in dress
Extreme, at once rapacious and profuse ;
Frequent in park, with lady at his side,
Ambling and prattling scandal as he goes ;
But rare at home, and never at his books,
Or with his pen, save when he scrawls a card ;
Constant at routs, familiar with a round
Of ladyships, a stranger to the poor ;
Ambitious of preferment for its gold,
And well prepared, by ignorance and sloth,
By infidelity and love of world,
To make God's work a sinecure ; a slave
To his own pleasures and his patron's pride ;
From such apostles, O ye mitred heads,
Preserve the Church ! and lay not careless hands
On skulls that cannot teach and will not learn."

Cowper.

all the superiority which is due to human learning, we contend that those acquirements are by no means essential to qualify a man to preach the gospel. Learning and piety combined, accompanied with a consciousness of the divine call, constitute the able and accomplished minister of Jesus Christ.

Although, as before stated, we do not consider a classical education an essential pre-requisite in the qualification of a gospel minister, yet we are not unmindful of the advantages resulting from a thorough knowledge of the various sciences which have a tendency to throw light upon the sacred pages, or to illustrate the different branches of Christian theology. Those who have drawn an opposite conclusion respecting us, have not duly considered this branch of our economy. The following quotations from our discipline, will show our views of the qualifications essential to a preacher of righteousness. Respecting those "*who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost to preach,*" the following questions are asked, viz. "1. Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they

the love of God abiding in them ? Do they desire nothing but God ? And are they holy in all manner of conversation ? 2. Have they gifts, as well as grace, for the work ? Have they, in some tolerable degree, a clear, sound understanding, a right judgment in the things of God, a just conception of salvation by faith ? And has God given them any degree of utterance ? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly ? Have they fruit ? 3. Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God, by their preaching ? As long as these three marks concur in any one, we believe he is called of God to preach."

Having satisfactory evidence, by the above marks, that a man is called of God to the sacred work of the ministry, he receives a license, first as a local preacher, and then, if approved by his brethren, he is received by an annual Conference as a probationer in the travelling ministry. In this probationary work he continues two years, before he is received as a member of the Conference, or ordained a deacon. During this time he is directed to a regular course of study, and is examined by the bishop, or a committee of

elders appointed by him, on the various subjects which had been recommended to his consideration. The following is the rule of Discipline upon this subject: "It shall be the duty of the bishops, or of a committee which they may appoint, at each annual Conference, to point out a course of reading and study proper to be pursued by candidates for the ministry; and the presiding elder, whenever such are presented to him, shall direct them to those studies which have been thus recommended. And before any such candidate is received into full connexion, he shall give satisfactory evidence respecting his knowledge of those particular subjects which have been recommended to his consideration." Let it be observed, that these are the steps to be taken before the candidate is received into the travelling ministry, and of course before he is consecrated to the office of a deacon.

In that section of the Discipline of our church, which speaks of the manner of employing our time profitably, when not engaged in preaching, the preacher is exhorted to

“ spend all the morning, or at least five hours in twenty-four, in reading,” “ and to read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly.” ‘ But,’ some are supposed to object, ‘ I have no taste for it.’ To such it is answered, “ Contract a taste for it, or return to your former employment.” By this it will be seen, that if there be any among us who despise useful knowledge, or who manifest an indifference to reading and study, they are not sanctioned by the Discipline of their church.

We believe, indeed, that a minister of the Lord Jesus ought to be thoroughly furnished for the great and important work in which he is engaged. Though he may not be acquainted with the original languages in which the holy Scriptures were written, (which, indeed, is very desirable,) he ought at least to understand his own. And though he is not sent to instruct mankind in human science, yet he should apply his mind to every branch of knowledge, which may enable him the better to understand and illustrate the interesting truths of God’s sacred word.

Although the pulpit was not erected for

the purpose of instructing mankind in human arts and sciences, yet, being frequently alluded to in the holy Scriptures, a knowledge of them will greatly assist to elucidate the sacred pages. A thorough knowledge of history, both civil and ecclesiastical, tends to throw light upon the word of God ; and it is peculiarly necessary to ascertain a correct view of the various theological controversies which have agitated the Christian church. Considered in this point of light, these studies have an important claim upon the attention of the gospel minister. But after all, his peculiar work is to bring mankind to an experimental acquaintance with Jesus Christ ; and this may be done by those whose minds have never been imbued with classical literature.

This, however, is not said to extenuate the fault of those, who, under the pretence that human learning is not essential, spend their time in mental indolence. It is their indispensable duty to spend their whole time religiously and conscientiously in the service of the sanctuary. So our church teaches.

See Sect. xvi. of the Form of Discipline. A minister who wastes his time in idleness, in foolish chit chat, or devotes it to secular pursuits, while receiving support from the church, for services he never renders, except simply to deliver a sermon now and then, deserves to be treated as a hireling, or to be discarded as a public nuisance. Is it not a disgrace to the ministerial character, to see a man under this sacred profession, entering into worldly speculations, manifesting all the cupidity of the subtle merchant, or exhibiting the cunning policy of a designing politician? If any conduct is more degrading, it is that of a man who, affecting to despise useful information in others, merely because he has it not himself, spends his precious moments in cracking jokes like a silly buffoon, grinning with laughter like a madman ;*

* "He that negotiates between God and man,
As God's ambassador, the grand concerns
Of judgment and of mercy, should beware
Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful
To court a grin, when you should woo a soul;
To break a jest, when pity should inspire
Pathetic exhortation; and t' address
The skittish fancy with facetious tales,
When sent with God's commission to the heart!

and thus diffusing a spirit of levity and dissipation wherever he moves. Surely such men have not seriously considered the command of the apostle Paul to Timothy—"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

But, there is no necessity for a minister to neglect the other duties of his office, such as visiting the people of his charge for religious conversation and prayer, preaching and administering to the sick and afflicted, &c. for the sake of study. These duties have an imperious demand upon him, and therefore claim his first attention. For a minister, when called to the performance of these peculiar duties of his office, to excuse himself on account of his studies, exposes his own weakness, and betrays a want of that very

So did not Paul. Direct me to a quip
Or merry turn in all he ever wrote,
And I consent you take it for your text,
Your only one, till sides and benches fail.
No: he was serious in a serious cause,
And understood too well the weighty terms,
That he had taken in charge. He would not stoop
To conquer those by jocular exploits,
Whom truth and soberness assail'd in vain."

Cowper.

qualification after which he professes to labour. To study merely for amusement, especially when professional duties demand our attention, is a most unpardonable fault in one who professes to devote his time and talent to the salvation of souls. To exhibit in active life a zeal proportionate to the knowledge acquired by a close application of the mind to useful study, is an evidence of having treasured up sound wisdom. Knowledge is no farther useful than it is applied to practical life. While the mind expands with comprehensive views of God in His works and ways, and the heart glows with love to God and man, let an active zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men exhibit itself on all proper occasions. Then shall it be acknowledged by all that we are sent of God to instruct mankind in that divine science which teaches "the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins." These are the essential qualifications of a minister of the Lord Jesus. It is expected, indeed, that he is sound in the faith, that he holds fast the fundamental truths of the gospel, such as human depravity, the proper atonement of Christ, justification by

grace through faith in Christ, the witness of the Spirit, holiness of heart and life, &c.

Now, so far as our ministry answers this description of character, we think we are justified in believing them called of God to preach the everlasting gospel ; and if consecrated according to the primitive form, as sketched out in the preceding part of this little essay, who will say they have not authority to administer the ordinances of Christ ? Shall the traditions of men be substituted for the word of God ? Is it said, “ that we have men among us who do not answer the character above described ? ” And suppose this were admitted ? Shall the mistake or the neglect of a few individuals be improved into an objection against the whole body ? Most of whom have made “ full proof of their ministry,” by their successful labours in the gospel, and by their godly behaviour and conversation ?

The Methodist ministry have another test by which their authority to preach Jesus Christ is evinced. I mean their success. I do not mean merely making proselytes to their sect. This is no proof that they are

sent by God ; because there are no set of men but what may proselyte others to their opinions, however erroneous or absurd. But I mean their success in *turning sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God*. That tens of thousands have been truly converted to God, and *made new creatures in Christ Jesus*, through their ministry, is attested by the most indubitable evidence, even their righteous lives, and the triumphant deaths of thousands of happy souls. God has, indeed, owned the Methodist ministry in a very signal manner in this respect. As if determined to *confound the wisdom of the prudent*, and evince His own power and goodness, He has selected these instruments, *that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of men*. To the multitudes who have been thus brought to the knowledge of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ, the Methodist ministers may say, “ If we be not apostles to others, yet doubtless we are to you ;” “ Ye are our epistle” of commendation, “ written in our hearts, known and read of all men.” We present these fruits of our ministry as

evidence of our being in the order of God. And this appeal is authorized by Scripture. When the apostleship of St. Paul was called in question by his enemies, among other topics of self-defence, he adduced the glorious effects of his ministrations, in bringing the heathen to the *obedience of Christ*. These were a living and incontrovertible testimony, which might be "*read of all men*," of his divine call to the work of the Christian ministry. And let any impartial observer look around upon the moral world, and follow the track of the Methodist ministry, and he will behold evident traces of the Redeemer's footsteps; *the barren wilderness has become a fruitful field*, and trees of righteousness stand loaded with the fruits of the Spirit.

We trust, therefore, that this objection, the want of a liberal education, cannot, with any consistency, be urged against our ministry. If this be wanting, we have that which is incomparably more valuable, a clear perception of the grand system of redemption through Jesus Christ, and an experimental knowledge of salvation by grace through faith in Him. And whatever of human sci-

ence will tend to diffuse this knowledge among men, we wish most ardently to pursue.

Let those who boast of their exclusive authority to preach the gospel, and to administer the ordinances of Jesus Christ, adduce as many witnesses as the Methodist ministry can, of their divine call to the work, and we will acknowledge them an equal claim with ourselves. Until this is done, we shall think it no arrogance to assert our superior claim to the grand work of the gospel ministry.

On the authority of God's word, we go farther, and say, that unless a man be truly converted to God, and walk constantly in his fear and love, however regularly he may have been set apart by the appointment of men for the work of the ministry, he is not called of God to preach ; and neither shall his word profit the people, even though he may be in the regular line of the priesthood, according to the fanciful succession asserted, without proof, by some. To be convinced of this, read the awful declarations of God in reference to this subject—"Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I

am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness ; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them ; therefore they shall not profit the people at all, saith the LORD.” “ And as for the prophet and the priest, and the people that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house.” One would suppose that such solemn words of the eternal God, were sufficient to make to tingle the ears of every unholy priest, who is not conscious of his being called and sent of God to teach the people ! To all such He saith, “ I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.” Jer. xxiii. 30—40.*

* “ The pulpit, therefore, (and I name it fill'd
With solemn awe, that bids me well beware
With what intent I touch that holy thing)—
The pulpit (when the sat'rist has at last,
Strutting and vap'ring in an empty school,
Spent all his force, and made no proselyte)—
I say the pulpit (in the sober use
Of its legitimate, peculiar pow'rs)
Must stand acknowledg'd, while the world shall stand,
The most important and effectual guard,
Support, and ornament of Virtue's cause.
There stands the messenger of truth : there stands
The legate of the skies ;—His theme divine,

According to the custom of the Jews, none were admitted into the priesthood, except those who were of the regular line ; (though others, as Amos, were called in an extraor-

His office sacred, his credentials clear.
 By him the violated law speaks out
 Its thunders ; and by him in strains as sweet
 As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.
 He establishes the strong, restores the weak,
 Reclaims the wand'rer, binds the broken heart,
 And, arm'd himself in panoply complete
 Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms
 Bright as his own, and trains, by every rule
 Of holy discipline, to glorious war,
 The sacramental host of God's elect !
 Are all such teachers ?— Would to Heav'n all were !
 But hark ; the doctor's voice !—fast wedg'd between
 Two empirics he stands, and with swoln cheeks
 Inspires the news, his trumpet. Keener far
 Than all invective is his bold harangue.
 While through that public organ of report
 He hails the clergy ; and defying shame,
 Announces to the world his own and theirs !
 He teaches those to read, whom schools dismiss'd,
 And colleges, untaught ; sells accent, tone,
 And emphasis in score, and gives to pray'r
 Th' *adagio* and *andante* it demands.
 He grinds divinity of other days
 Down into modern use ; transforms old print
 To zigzag manuscript, and cheats the eyes
 Of gallery critics by a thousand arts.
 Are there who purchase of the doctor's ware ?
 O, name it not in Gath !—it cannot be,
 That grave and learned clerks should need such aid.
 He doubtless is in sport, and does but droll,
 Assuming thus a rank unknown before—
 Grand caterer and dry-nurse of the church !”

Cowper.

dinary way to prophesy unto the people) but even this did not entitle them to the office, unless otherwise accredited of God, nor exempt them from the threatened punishment. “ And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings ; yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed—And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him, of life and peace ; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips : he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. But ye are departed out of the way ; ye have caused many to stumble at the law ; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts : therefore have I made you contemptible and base before all

the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law." Mal. ii. 1—9. This tremendous passage needs no comment. It is only wished that the reader may pay it particular attention. Although these priests were descended from the house of Levi, who *did walk with God in peace and equity, and turned many from iniquity*, they were, nevertheless, on account of their own departure from the covenant of God, threatened with having their *seed corrupted, their blessings cursed*, and with being *made contemptible and base among the people*. Of what use was it to these corrupt priests, to be able to reckon a long line of ancestors in the priesthood? Did that qualify them to administer acceptably before the Lord? Rather, did not the malediction of heaven fall the heavier upon them for having abused such high and distinguished privileges?

And did not Christ denounce a similar curse upon the scribes and Pharisees, because of their sinful defection from the pure demands of the law, for their pride and hypocrisy? "Beware," says he, "of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greet-

ings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts ; which devour widows' houses, and for a show make long prayers : the same shall receive greater condemnation." Luke xx. 46, 47. And let any man consult the history of the church, especially after the third century, and he will find the Christian priesthood equally corrupt ; though doubtless there were always more or less, who maintained the purity of the Christian doctrine and practice. And even those who contend for uninterrupted succession cannot agree where to trace it from, nor, consequently, through what channel it has been transmitted. But allowing the chain has remained unbroken, what virtue could there have been in those links which were incrustated with the rust of pride, hypocrisy, and almost every abomination ? Were the impure hands of these men essential to constitute an authorized ministry ? Nay, their *seed was corrupted*, and God had rendered *them contemptible and base among the people*, so that the *offerings of the Lord were abhorred*. Can we suppose for

a moment that the *Holy One of Israel* is thus *limited* in his way of working! When, by a long abuse of his mercies, men have rendered themselves vile in His eyes, has he not a right to reject them, as he did the sons of Eli, and introduce others in their place? Yes, this right he has ever exercised, to the confusion of human pride, and human wisdom.

Were our ministry all able to decorate their discourses with the elegant habiliments of the Greek and Latin classics, it is doubted whether their real beauty would be improved, or their intrinsic excellence much enhanced. What a pitiful appearance does a minister of the Lord Jesus make, who abandons the sublime and energetic language of inspiration, substituting in its place the sayings of Seneca, Plato, Socrates, or any other of the heathen poets and philosophers. Did any of these sages of antiquity ever equal the Jewish prophets, Isaiah, David, and others, in beauty, sublimity, and energy of language, depth of thought, or purity and elevation of sentiment? Did any of them ever equal the Lord Jesus, and his apostles, in profoundness of wisdom, in the beautiful simplicity of their

style, in perspicuity of illustration, in conclusive reasoning, or in awakening all the tender and sympathetic affections of our nature? They may, doubtless, be studied with pleasure and profit; but a Christian minister, who understands himself, will never exchange the poetical compositions of that sweet singer in Israel, David, and his associates, for the verses of either Homer or Virgil. Neither will he descend from the fruitful hills of Palestine, where Isaiah and others received their inspiration, to range in the groves of Greece and Italy. While the wise men who inhabited the latter places, with all their literary advantages, leave you in doubt and fear respecting some of the most interesting truths, the Son of Mary, the fishermen of Galilee, and the tent-maker of Tarsus, will throw demonstration in your path, and conduct you infallibly to the fair fields of immortality. While the heathen poets and philosophers leave you to pant in a dry and thirsty land, the intrepid followers of Jesus of Nazareth will lead you to the flowing fountain of the water of life—

“ All truth is from the sempiternal source
Of light divine. But Egypt, Greece, and Rome,

Drew from the stream below. More favour'd we
 Drink, when we choose it, from the fountain-head.
 To them it flow'd much mingied and defil'd
 With hurtful error, prejudice, and dreams
 Illusive of philosophy, so call'd,
 But falsely. Sages after sages strove
 In vain to filter off a crystal draught
 Pure from the lees, which often more enhanc'd
 The thirst than slak'd it, and not seldom bred
 Intoxication and delirium wild."

Cowper.

Who would exchange the pleasant and healthful bowers of Paradise, for the Elysian groves! Those who have been seated under this "shadow with great delight, and have found food sweet to their taste," will not hastily exchange this consecrated ground for the unhallowed fields of heathenism. Taught in the school of Christ, the Christian minister, so long as he remains true to his trust, will not forsake his "strong hold," nor cast off his "Urim and Thummim," nor ever forget the necessity of the divine afflatus, to enable him effectually to withstand the onsets of error, and powerfully to "wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Neither will such a man place more dependence on the traditions of men, however dignified, than upon the declarations of God in

His word, the inward calls of the Spirit, and the authority derived from the testimony of those who have been truly converted to God by his ministry. Though he may be able to trace his external designation to the work of the ministry to a regular source, in the manner the Methodist ministry can, still he derives greater satisfaction from a consciousness of his having been called of God, and of having that call made more certain by the continual testimony of the divine Spirit, accompanying his word, and bringing consolation to his own heart.

Not depending, therefore, merely upon that corrupt stream through which the Christian ministry flowed for so many centuries, for the purity of our ministry, or the validity of our ordinances, we make our appeal to those marks of a gospel ministry already exhibited, and rest our cause upon the arguments we have adduced in its defence. When these are invalidated by Scripture authority, and the usages of the primitive church, we will acknowledge our mistake, and either submit to a reordination, or give up the work of the ministry for some secular employment.

CHAPTER IX.

Of the General Conference—how formed—and its Powers.

EVERY part of Methodism, as distinguished from other Christian establishments, seemed to originate from necessity, and from peculiar circumstances. The introduction of Class-meetings originated, in the first place, from temporal considerations. The society being in debt, one man possessing more wealth than some of his brethren, proposed giving a penny a week, and, associating eleven others with him, he would furnish a penny for each that was not able to pay for himself. This brought them together once a week; and this afforded a fit opportunity to make inquiry respecting their spiritual welfare also, to reprove the disorderly, and to comfort the feeble-minded. The necessity of some such regulation had been long felt, and was now introduced, says Mr. Wesley, “while we were thinking of quite a different thing.”

As the societies multiplied, and it became necessary to appoint preachers to provide for

their spiritual improvement, as these preachers, according to the itinerant plan pursued by Mr. Wesley, were to be changed from time to time, it became also necessary for them to assemble together, at least once a year, in order to consult together, and each one take his station, so as not to interfere one with another. Thus originated the Conference, first in Great Britain, and afterward in America. But in these United States, to which our observations principally relate, being scattered over so large a territory, it soon became very inconvenient for all the preachers to assemble in one place. On this account, as the work extended, there were appointed several annual Conferences in the same year, one after another, at a convenient distance from each other, for the superintending bishop to attend and preside in them. There are now (1820) twelve annual Conferences in the United States. After some time, when the affairs of the church became weighty, it was agreed that there should be a general Conference of the elders, as many as could conveniently attend, once in four years. But as the number of elders conti-

nually multiplied, it was considered expedient to adopt some measure by which the number attending on this general Conference might be diminished, and yet to preserve permanently a sufficient number of the most aged and experienced, to form a weighty and respectable council to transact the business of the church.

Accordingly, in May 1808, by previous notification, a general convention of elders was called together with a view to establish a delegated general Conference, chosen by each annual Conference, by ballot or otherwise. This general convention of elders proceeded, among other things, to form a constitution, limiting the powers of all future general Conferences, which, according to the present provisions made, were to be composed of not more than one for every *five*, nor less than one for every *seven* of the members of each annual Conference; and those elders eligible to be members of the delegation must have travelled four years as preachers. This is the way that the present delegated general Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed.

Let us now inquire into the powers of this Conference. It was said above, that this Conference is restricted by constitutional limits and provisions, in the exercise of its powers. By consulting the constitution adopted by the abovementioned convention, it will appear that the general Conference is restricted in the following particulars, (viz.)

- “ 1. The general Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our articles of religion, nor establish any new standards or rule of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.
2. They shall not allow of more than one representative for every five members of the annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every seven.
3. They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy, or destroy the plan of an itinerant general superintendency.
4. They shall not revoke or change the general rules of the united societies.
5. They shall not do away the privileges of our ministers or preachers of trial by a

committee, and of an appeal : Neither shall they do away the privileges of our members, of trial before the society, or by a committee, and of an appeal.

6. They shall not appropriate the produce of the book concern, or of the charter fund, to any purpose other than for the benefit of the travelling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children. Provided nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of all the annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the general Conference succeeding, shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions.”—
See Discipline.

With these exceptions, the general Conference have full and ample powers, to modify, alter, or change, or to make any additional rules, they may deem expedient and necessary for the benefit of the community. The members of our church may, however, rest pretty well satisfied in respect to those articles mentioned in the above restrictions, as it is next to impossible for any general Conference to

touch them, according to the provisional article in the concluding paragraph of the constitution; for, in the first place, no alteration can take place in the particulars enumerated, without the *joint recommendation* of *all* the annual Conferences; and then, secondly, it must be done by a majority of *two-thirds* of the whole Conference ! This amounts to almost a total prohibition.

The general Conference possess the sole right of making rules for the government of the church, under the above constitutional restrictions; of electing their superintendents, their book-agents, and of trying appeals of preachers who have been tried and condemned by an annual Conference. The annual Conferences, of course, are but executive bodies, except in some cases which relate to their own internal regulations, and the raising supplies for carrying forward the work of God. To the general Conference, as they derive their authority from them, the superintending bishops are responsible for every part of their executive administration, which passes under review before that body once in four

years,—and, in the present order of things, the superintendents seem to hold themselves responsible, not only for their own personal administration, but also for every part of the executive government.* An awful responsibility! From which a conscientious man might reasonably wish, were it practicable, to be delivered. A conscious sense of high responsibility, however, is an incitement to diligence. But as all executive powers emanate, now, from the general Conference, they must necessarily, as far as the acts of said Conference are conformable to the constitution, be subject to their control, and responsible to them for their official conduct,

* It ought to be recollected, however, that to aid them in the safe discharge of their arduous duties, the characters of the preachers, both as it respects their religious and moral conduct, and their administration of discipline, pass in review before an annual Conference every year. And the presiding elders, who are appointed by the bishops, having travelled through their respective districts, are enabled to give an account of the talents and usefulness of each preacher. This method greatly aids the bishops in the discharge of their duty in the appointment of the preachers to their stations, as well as relieves them of some share of the burden of responsibility. The annual Conferences aid the bishops, in the execution of discipline, and the bishops aid the Conferences, in giving an energetic direction to their affairs.

as well as for their moral and Christian behaviour. But the arduous and highly responsible duties of the superintendents, as well as the fidelity with which they have hitherto performed them, well entitle them to the sympathy and confidence of the general Conference, and, indeed, to the whole Church.

It will be perceived from the foregoing restrictions, that, however disposed any general Conference might be to make innovations upon our established doctrines, to do away the itinerating superintendency, or to abridge our people or ministers of their Christian liberties, they have no authority to do so, unless previously recommended by *all* the annual Conferences, and concurred in by *two-thirds* of the general Conference.

I know not that we have any account in the sacred Scripture, of a particular council of ministers, except that recorded in Acts xv. which was composed of "the apostles and elders," who "came together for to consider of this matter," which was agitated by the Pharisees concerning the necessity of cir-

cumcising the Gentile converts, verse 5, 6. This assemblage of the *apostles and elders* is referred to here in vindication of the Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It has been objected to us, that we are not scriptural, because our Conferences are entirely composed of ecclesiastics, by which the laity are excluded from any share in the government of the church. The laity are not excluded from any share in the *administration* of the government, as we shall notice presently more fully, although they are, it is acknowledged, excluded from any immediate share in the *legislative* acts of the church. But whatever may be pleaded from the usages of other churches, in favour of associating lay members with the body of elders in making rules of discipline for the government of the church, it is certain, I think, that no precedent for this practice can be found in the holy Scriptures. The inferior branches of the church were mere executive bodies, whose duty it was to carry into execution the laws enacted by those to whom the right of making them belonged. In this respect,

therefore, we think we are justified from Scripture authority.

Perhaps it may be expedient to observe here, that every officer in our church, except a Class-leader,* who is appointed by the preacher, is elected by a majority of votes. The quarterly meeting Conference is composed of all the stewards, leaders, exhorters, local and travelling preachers, within the bounds of any particular circuit or station. They assemble together once in three months, to transact the business, temporal and spiritual, of the circuit. By this body the stewards, who have the management of the temporal concerns of the circuit, are, after being nominated by the preacher, appointed. A young man, who thinks himself called of God to preach, makes application to this body, and if approved by a majority present, he receives a recommendation to the district Conference of local preachers, signed by the president of the meeting, who is generally a presiding elder, recommending him to that body to be licensed to preach among us.

* Unless we also except a Presiding Elder.

In this manner he is elected. If any person, thus licensed, feels it his duty to enter the travelling ministry, being directed to a course of study by the presiding elder, as the Discipline in such cases directs, he makes application now, since the last general Conference,* to the district Conference of local preachers, and if approved by them, he is recommended to an annual Conference. Here his character, both as it respects his gifts, grace, and usefulness, passes a strict examination ; and then, if approved by the voice of a majority present, he is received as a probationer, in the itinerant ministry. He now is placed under some experienced elder on a circuit, and continues in his probationary

* Previous to the last general Conference, all local preachers received their license to exercise their gifts among us by the suffrage of the quarterly meeting Conference ; and also those who designed to apply for admission into the travelling ministry, must obtain a recommendation from the same body to the annual Conference : but the last general Conference instituted a *District Conference of Local Preachers*, comprehending all the local preachers who have been licensed two years within the bounds of a presiding elder's district ; who have authority "to license proper persons to preach, to recommend suitable candidates to the annual Conference for deacons' or elders' orders in the local connexion, for admission on trial in the travelling connexion." See *Discipline*, last edit. p. 68.

ministry two years, before he is eligible to the office of a deacon. If, at the end of two years, nothing appears against him, he is received as a member of an annual Conference, elected to the office of a deacon, and ordained by the presiding bishop. After two years more, if no objections be preferred against him, he is elected by the Conference, and ordained by the bishop and a select number of presbyters, to the office of an elder. From among these elders are chosen by ballot, once in four years, the delegates which compose the general Conference; and this general Conference, when one or more is wanted, elect by ballot a bishop or bishops. By this brief analysis, it will be seen that every part of our government is elective; and those who make the rules, are as much bound by them, as it respects their moral, religious, and ministerial conduct, as any one else. And as far as scriptural and prudential means will secure to our people a pure and upright ministry, so far they are secured by those parts of our Discipline which relate to the moral and Christian conduct of our ministers,

as well as to the manner in which an accused minister is to be tried, acquitted, suspended, or condemned.* And that no minister, who may have been accused and condemned, shall have any cause to complain, he is allowed an appeal from the judgment of an annual to the general Conference. The general Conference, therefore, may be considered as the centre of union to the whole body, and the guardian of the rights and privileges of both ministers and people. If they abuse their powers, an appeal to the Christian world is the last resort.



CHAPTER X.

Of the Privileges of the Members of our Church.

THAT every member of the community, whether civil or religious, has certain rights and privileges, of which no one has authority to deprive him, unless forfeited by malconduct, is a proposition universally admitted. The property, reputation, life, as well as the

* See Discipline, chap. i. sec. xviii. also sec. xiv. xv.

free exercise of his moral powers in matters of judgment, under certain limitations correctly ascertained by legal restraints,* are the unalienable rights of every individual member of society. But no man is at liberty to violate the laws of God, or to neglect the requirements of the gospel, with impunity. There are, moreover, certain prudential regulations, which grow out of the state of society, and which varying circumstances may require to be modified in order to suit such

* What is meant by these legal restraints is, that when a man has voluntarily submitted himself a member of any community, he has also bound himself to regulate his conduct according to the laws by which that community is governed. If, on more mature consideration, he finds such rules existing as he cannot conscientiously submit to, he has an unquestionable right to state his objections, and, if he cannot, by lawful means, effect an alteration, he must quietly withdraw. But a man ought ever to distinguish between matters of *judgment* and matters of *conscience*. The *conscience* can only be affected about principles that have a moral tendency, that go to influence his conduct as a moral being, responsible to God for his conduct. The *judgment* is not only employed about these things, but is also occupied in discriminating between things of an indifferent nature, the mere propriety or impropriety of certain things, rites, or ceremonies, or mere usages adopted for the sake of convenience, and which do not affect the moral conduct of a man. Respecting all such merely prudential regulations, a man may, and ought to, acquiesce in the judgment of a majority for peace sake.

variations, to which every member of society will feel himself under obligation to submit. Indeed, without such regulations, and a proper submission to them, society cannot exist.

As far as these observations apply to the church of Christ, the rulers of said church are bound and limited in respect to the rules they may prescribe by the unerring word of God. And although this word may not descend to all the minutiae of those prudential regulations, the necessity of which might originate from time, or place, or particular exigencies, yet it has set bounds to men in this respect, beyond which they have no right to go : but as long as these regulations are kept within the limits prescribed by Christ and his apostles, every member of the community is under an indispensable obligation to submit to them. After having examined the canons of the church, (and this he should do before he becomes a member of it) and having signified his belief in them and, determination to regulate his conduct by them, he has no right, while he remains a member of the community, to rise in opposition to them, and

thereby disturb the tranquillity of the society. His only alternative, if convinced there are rules to which he cannot with a safe conscience submit, is, to assign his reasons, and then quietly withdraw. If, indeed, he thinks the articles of faith, or any part of the government, are so defective, as to require an exposure, he has the same right as all other rational beings have, after he has withdrawn, to detect and expose them.

These observations are made with a view to introduce to the reader's notice the rules by which the Methodist Episcopal Church governs its members. Now, although the laity have no hand in *making* rules, any farther than they recommend candidates for the ministry, yet, it will be found that they have a voice in the *execution* of them. And let those rules and regulations be made by whom they may, if they are according to scripture, or not contrary to an express precept of Christ, they must be binding upon all.

In respect to the general rules by which the members of our church are governed as it relates to their moral and Christian conduct, they are expressed in as clear and com-

prehensive manner as any set of ethics, I believe, ever were; and they include all the great principles of morality, and also of Christian duty. The condition required of those who wish to unite with us is, "A desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." The limits of this work will only permit me to refer to the rules in the Discipline of our Church. See p. 76. last edit. These rules are declared unalterable by the constitution.

In regard to those who are accused of immoral conduct, of evil words or tempers, or of a defection from the order of the church, the preacher has no right to execute the censure of the church, until such person has had an opportunity of answering for himself before a select number of his brethren of equal standing in the church, who act as jurors, hear the charge and defence, and examine testimony on both sides, and then decide upon the guilt or innocence of the accused person, according to the weight of evidence. And if the accused think himself dealt by unjustly, he has the right of an appeal to the

quarterly meeting Conference, described in the preceding chapter, who investigate the subject again, and either confirm or disannul the judgment passed upon him. If finally condemned, such person can have no farther privilege in our church, "until confession, contrition, and proper trial."* That this procedure is both scriptural and rational, I presume none will deny. St. Paul told the Corinthians, in reference to the incestuous member of that church, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, (that is, my representative in the ministry,) with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. And the reason he assigns for excommunicating this disorderly person is, "That a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." ver. 6. The retaining corrupt and immoral members in the church; if they will not be reformed, is the most effectual way to destroy the purity of

* Discipline, p. 91.

the whole body. They must, therefore, be cut off. A similar direction St. Paul gave to Titus ; “ A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject.” Tit. iii.

10. The act of the church in excluding a member, is founded on the supposition that the member has been “ guilty of some crime,” some act of immorality, “ expressly forbidden by the word of God,” and that the guilty person is incorrigible in his wickedness. Respecting all such, Christ saith, “ Let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican;” that is, have no more Christian fellowship with him.

For minor offences, such as “ neglect of duties of any kind, imprudent conduct, indulging sinful tempers or words, or disobedience to the order and discipline of the church,” first private reproof is to be given, and if there be an acknowledgment of the fault, and proper humiliation, the person is to be forgiven ; but if repeated, and continued in, no signs of repentance being given, the offender must be cut off from the church, as a disorderly member.*

* Discipline, p. 92.

When any disputes happen between members of our church, (except in extreme cases, when a process at law is allowable) the parties are directed to refer the subject of dispute to arbitrators, two of whom chosen by the contending parties, and the third by the two arbiters, who shall examine all the circumstances of the case, and decide accordingly. If either party, however, be dissatisfied with the judgment given, he may apply to the quarterly meeting Conference, who may, if they judge it expedient, grant a second arbitration, consisting of *five* members of the church, four to be chosen by the parties at variance, and the fifth by the other four arbiters. Their judgment is final; and the person refusing to abide by it, is excluded the church.*

These instances of the manner of exercising church discipline are introduced, to show the equitable manner in which the members of our church are dealt with. And let it be recollected, that these privileges cannot be

* Discipline, p. 42.

taken from them according to an article in the constitution above recited, even by a general Conference, unless as above provided.

In respect to the temporal concerns of the church, although the general Conference possess the right of fixing the salary of the preachers, yet they have no control over the property of the members ; neither is there any article in the Discipline, which exposes a man to Church censure for not contributing to the support of the ministry.

Notice the allowance which the general Conference have given to a preacher, and then judge whether they have betrayed a spirit of avarice, as some have most unwarrantably accused them ! One hundred dollars is allowed to a single, and two hundred to a married preacher annually ; and if he have children, sixteen dollars a year is allowed to all to the age of seven years, and twenty-four dollars annually from the age of seven to fourteen years.* Knowing, however, that this allowance is but barely sufficient to furnish

* Discipline, p. 176.

clothing for a preacher and his family, the general Conference in 1816, authorized each quarterly meeting Conference to appoint a committee, whose duty it shall be to make an estimate of what should be allowed to a married preacher for his house-rent, table expenses, and fuel.* By this act, the general Conference have transferred to the people the right of saying what the allowance of their preachers shall be ; and the *stewards* are at liberty to raise the amount necessary to meet such demand in any way they may judge expedient. So little control have the preachers over the property of the people. All the moneys collected for these purposes go into the hands of stewards, who are appointed by, and are responsible to, the quarterly meeting Conference ; and the money is appropriated by them as the Discipline in such cases directs.

Those who impartially consider these parts of our government, will be astonished, (if extraordinary things had not long ceased to excite astonishment) that any one should cry

* Discipline, p. 184.

out against the powers of our ministry. What more privileges any people can desire, one cannot tell, unless they desire to throw off all scriptural restraint, and each one do what is "right in his own eyes," and thus introduce anarchy and confusion. That a man, fond of power, may assume a lordly tone, and exercise a despotic authority, is granted ; but he is not sanctioned by the established authorities of his church ; and for any act of mal-administration he is responsible to those from whom he received his official character. And as long as the discipline, which relates to the moral and Christian conduct of preachers, is enforced, it is impossible the people should be long cursed with an immoral minister.*

CHAPTER XI.

*Itinerating Episcopacy best adapted to promote
the ends of Church Government.*

IT is not my design to enter into a comparative view of the different modes of church government. It is granted that each has its

* See Discipline, p. 63, last edit.

peculiar advantages and disadvantages. It seems, indeed, impossible in the present imperfect state of human society, to adjust a government that shall obviate every difficulty, or secure every advantage. The ministry of the Lord Jesus seems called, in the order of things, that they may be extensively useful in their ministrations, to make a sacrifice of many of the domestic comforts of life, and to endure numerous privations, which those, in other circumstances, may lawfully enjoy. This, as the apostle Paul said, they “endure, for the elect’s sake, that they may obtain salvation by Jesus Christ.”

We are willing to grant, that a ministry established upon the Presbyterian plan, each individual congregation having its stated pastor, besides affording to the minister all the pleasures of domestic life, may also afford him an opportunity of becoming more intimately acquainted with his flock, and, if diligent in his calling, he may be very useful in *building them up on their most holy faith!* But a ministry entirely local, and so much under the control, and at the mercy of the people, is

not likely to be sufficiently independent to be plain and energetic, nor sufficiently diffusive for a general spread of the gospel. Plain truth, addressed to the consciences of a lukewarm people, or the denunciations of heaven pointed to the hardened sinner, is very likely to give such offence, unless reformation be the result, as to make the people clamorous against the man who has had the boldness to expose their folly and danger. What follows? A dismissal of the faithful minister from his charge. Besides, there are but few men possessed of that fund of knowledge necessary to afford that variety, which seems necessary to keep up the attention of the people for any great length of time. These are some of the disadvantages attendant on a ministry entirely local. Its advantages may be estimated better by those whose experience qualifies them to be more competent judges.

But however we may speculate upon the comparative merits of the different systems of church order and government, it seems reasonable to suppose, that the method adopt-

ed by Christ and his apostles would be the most likely to accomplish the end of redemption. This was an itinerating ministry. And if the Methodist ministry could furnish no other argument in favour of their system, that of its being in conformity in this respect, to the one pursued by the primitive evangelists and preachers, might be deemed sufficient. We wish, however, not to be misunderstood. We do not consider it essential that every minister should ride a circuit. In all those places, where the congregations are sufficiently numerous to demand the presence and labours of a stationed pastor, we have them stationed, though not for life—they are subject to removal, at least at the end of two years, and be succeeded by others. By this means we secure all the *spiritual* advantages of a stationary ministry, and add to those advantages possessed by other denominations, the interchange of a great variety of ministerial gifts. Is not the flock of Christ more likely to be fed plentifully by these means, than it would be by having but one pastor continually? Doubtless the Holy Ghost saw

this method was best adapted to the state of society, or he would not have directed his apostles and evangelists to adopt it.

We know, moreover, that a prudent enforcement of a scriptural discipline, which reprove, reforms, or excludes disorderly members, as well as protects and encourages the faithful, is essential to the prosperity of the church. And it is equally certain, that if the execution of this discipline is wholly in the hands of the people, especially if the majority of them are become corrupt, the guilty will often escape with impunity. And even if the minister be associated with the people, if he be constantly stationed among them, he is more likely to have his partial attachments, to be biassed by interest, or local prejudices, than if he were only resident among them for a short time. We are not so vain, however, as to suppose the contrary system is entirely exempt from these embarrassments in the execution of discipline. All that is contended for is, that it has, at least, some advantages in this respect.

That a church, whose chief ministers are itinerating superintendents, who annually tra-

vel through the bounds of the whole work, has the advantage, in respect to spreading the gospel extensively, I think, must be undisputed. In addition to their being free from those local partialities and attachments which are so common to men in this life, they are capable of *overseeing*, in the most emphatical sense of that word, the whole flock, and are the better qualified for an impartial execution of the discipline of the church. Add to this, the many places in which they may preach the word of life, remote from the stated congregations, and thus perform the work of missionaries, while executing the official duties of their station.

Another benefit resulting from the mode of government established by the Methodist Episcopal Church is, that it tends to preserve the whole body "in the unity of the spirit and the bonds of peace." And certainly this is one of the chief ends of church government. The many divisions, and sub-divisions witnessed among those denominations, whose government is according to the congregational plan, which puts an overbalancing power

into the hands of the people, are no small evidence of some defect in the principle of government. Now, although an itinerating episcopacy may not altogether obviate these evils, yet, it must be acknowledged, that it has a tendency to prevent them, and to cement the bonds of a general union more strongly. Deriving its authority from a general conference of elders, who make a part, and a very important part of the episcopacy, and which forms the centre of union to the whole mystical body, it carries with it a very commanding influence, and operates to produce a uniformity of sentiments and views ; and also produces a sameness of features throughout the entire body. In this respect, there is a striking resemblance between ours and the primitive church. “ We are all one body,” says Tertullian, “ united in one bond of religion, discipline, and hope.” The same may be said, with some trifling exceptions, of the Methodist Episcopal Church : for although some have, at times, separated from the main body, such have never yet prospered : they have either returned to the

bosom of the church, or otherwise withered to insignificance.

Experience is the most infallible test of all theories. This speaks strongly in favour of an itinerating episcopacy. The blessed effects of this ministry for these fifty years past, are seen and acknowledged by all impartial minds. So much so, that other denominations have stepped into our tracks, in order to extend, by these means, the influence of their ministry. The various missionaries now pouring forth through the land, are but imitating the Methodist itinerancy, which was in successful operation long before one of these missionaries was in existence.* This is not

* It is not meant by this remark, that there were no missionaries in existence before our missionaries arose. The many missionaries sent forth by the Catholic church at different periods, is well known to those conversant with ecclesiastical history. Neither have the Protestants been unmindful of the cause of missions. In this country, so early as 1631, attempts were made by *Elliot* and others to evangelize the aborigines of North America. These, however, were not properly itinerant missionaries. The most laborious in the mission cause, have been the Moravians. They have now nine different missionary stations. But they are all comparatively local stations. These indefatigable men were, however, but little before John Wesley, in the commencement of their missionary labours. The "Particular Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel

mentioned by way of regret that the Christian world is at last awakened to the most effectual method of spreading the gospel ; but it is done with a view to show the utility of the plan. Personal sacrifices of ease, and the sweets of social life, must, to be sure, be endured, to perpetuate the system ; but *eternity* shall abundantly compensate the faithful and conscientious labourer for all his hardships which he has endured for Christ's sake.

I have thus endeavoured to give a brief view of the economy of our church. I am sensible that much more might have been said, and doubtless, by some, much more to the purpose. But my object has been, 1. To condense the whole subject in as few

among the Heathen,' was not instituted until 1792, long after the Methodist missionaries went forth ; and the *London Missionary Society* did not commence its operations until 1795. Since that time various missionary establishments have been organized ; and many missionaries have been sent out. The Methodists arose in London in 1739 ; and in 1766 their missionaries came to this country : and their ministry has borne a missionary character from the beginning. We heartily wish success to every evangelical attempt to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whether it be by missionary exertions, or by a located ministry.

words as possible, that the reader might not be lost in a labyrinth of unnecessary reasonings, and useless speculations. 2. It was not my design so much to answer arguments, and obviate objections, as it was to present an impartial view of our church government, and of some of the authorities and reasons upon which it rests. If these objects are accomplished, my end is answered, and shall be abundantly compensated for the labour of writing.

APPENDIX.

Observations on the Duties of the People towards their Ministers.

IN the preceding chapters we have surveyed both the qualifications and the duties of ministers of the gospel. They are men called of God, first from darkness to light, and then, secondly, are called by the Holy Spirit to the special work of the ministry. In that church we have been reviewing, we have seen that a man cannot be an accredited minister

without making great temporal sacrifices. In addition to the extra labour they must necessarily perform as itinerating men, if they have families and relatives, they must tear themselves from all the enjoyments of domestic life, and committing their circle of earthly friends to the protection of God, they go forth into the field, and labour through heat and cold, wet and dry, over hill and dale, in order to gather in the lost sheep of the house of Israel. So far from stipulating for a specific amount as a pecuniary compensation for their labours, they throw themselves upon the mercy of God and his people, for temporal support. And though many of the difficulties with which they once contended are now removed, yet they still many of them at least, persevere under very serious embarrassments. Were some of them to tell their story, they no doubt would extort the tear of sympathy. This, however, is not their object.

We grant, indeed, that they *owe* their services to the church, and having done all that is commanded them, they have nothing whereof to glory—they have only done their duty.

But there is also a duty which the church owes to them. I shall speak, 1. Of the pecuniary aid without which they cannot proceed in their work.

That every true minister of Jesus Christ, who devotes himself exclusively to the service of the sanctuary, is entitled, according to the gospel economy, to a competent support from the people for whose spiritual advantage he labours, is a truth which admits of no controversy. How else can they live? Their calling precludes the possibility of attending to secular business. But the declaration of the apostle Paul puts the subject beyond dispute; "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel." "Who goeth," says he, "a warfare, at any time, at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the

corn. Doth God take care for oxen ? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes ? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written——If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things ?” 1 Cor. ix. 7—11. The meaning of the apostle in this passage cannot well be mistaken. He declares that a minister of the gospel has the same right to expect a maintenance from the people who receive spiritual benefit from his ministry, as a vinedresser has to partake of the fruit of his vineyard, or a shepherd to receive of the milk of his flock ; and he supports his position by an appeal to the voice of God in his law.

It is true, that in verse 15, he tells them that he had “ used none of these things, neither have I written these things that it should be so done unto me ;” but although, from prudential considerations, he refused to receive any pecuniary compensation from the Corinthians, he did receive supplies, at various times, from other churches. See Phil. iv. 10—16. 2 Cor. xi. 8. It is, indeed, no disgrace for a minister to “ labour with his own

hands," as this great apostle sometimes did, provided it does not interfere with the more important duties of his high and responsible office. But no one man appears to be adequate for more than one employment. If more be attempted, either the one or the other must suffer for want of suitable attention. Those, to be sure, whose pecuniary circumstances raise them above want, may exempt themselves both from secular pursuits, and from receiving support from the people; and, perhaps, among the Methodist ministers, one such in five hundred may be found! But whatever may be the advantages of some in this respect, and however proper and convenient it may be for others to provide for themselves, by attention to secular pursuits, it is manifest, that an itinerant ministry, destitute of property, cannot exist without temporal support from the people. Their mode of life, continually upon the move on circuits, besides being subject to an annual remove from one circuit to another, renders it totally impracticable for them to provide for their own temporal support.

This, no doubt, is somewhat of a delicate subject to touch. To avoid becoming rich by the gospel, on the one hand, and that indigence, which reduces a man to entire dependence and suffering, on the other, might require nicer calculation, than we are capable of making. The restraints which the gospel economy lays upon all its professors, and especially upon its ministers, forbid their living in either ease or luxury at the people's expense. This would defeat all the great objects of Christianity. On the other hand, to reduce the ministry to that state of indigence which deprives them of a comfortable support, is to destroy that independence and dignity of character, which they ever ought to support. "All that a man hath will he give for his life." Mendicity draws after it numerous evils. It subjects a man to those mortifications which naturally tend to destroy that noble independence of mind, which ought ever to characterize an ambassador of the Most High ; or if a man can become indifferent to this, and throw off all reserve, and turn public beggar, how are all those fine

sensibilities of our nature, which distinguish the Christian from the savage, blunted, and those exquisite pleasures resulting from equanimity of soul destroyed !

Incompetency of support prevents the exercise of *gratitude*, one of the noblest principles, as well as purest pleasures, of the human soul ; and also the acknowledgment of *justice*, which induces a sort of repining, equally abhorrent to a liberal mind, and destructive of mutual affection and confidence.

In addition to these evils, it tempts a man to resort to a reprehensible artfulness of conduct, representing the poverty of his condition with a view to excite the compassion of the people in his behalf. And if there should be any sufficiently sordid to hide their real condition, in order to gratify an avaricious disposition, how does the begging system favour their corrupt designs ! In vain may we reprobate this niggardly practice, so long as we give those an opportunity to indulge in it, who may find it convenient for their interest. And the most effectual way to banish this kind of duplicity is, to adopt a system of finance by which a competency may be afforded to all.

Those who know the feelings of a husband, a wife, father, or mother, well know how to sympathize with those preachers, who have families depending on them for support, and who nevertheless feel as if a dispensation of the gospel is committed to them. Perhaps it is one of the most trying circumstances in which a man can be placed, to be continually labouring for the public good, and then have to bow down to that same public, and beg for a morsel of bread. Such a state of dependence must very much weaken the energies of the soul, and consequently circumscribe his ministerial usefulness.

While it is left, without any kind of apportionment, to the indiscriminate and voluntary contributions of the multitude, to raise the needful supplies, the burden will always fall heavy upon a few of the most liberal. By this means, the avaricious are left in the undisturbed possession of their golden god, and of their sordid disposition. Whether any method can be adopted in the present state of things, to remove these embarrassments, is uncertain. It is, however, very

desirable that some system might be adopted to equalize the burden, if such it may be called, as much as possible.

This desire is authorized by the holy Scriptures. St. Paul, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, says, “ For I mean not that other men be eased, and you burdened ; but by an EQUALITY, that now at this time your ABUNDANCE may be a SUPPLY for their want, that their ABUNDANCE also may be a SUPPLY for your want, that there may be EQUALITY.” How plain is it that the apostle designed, in these directions, to guard against an UNEQUAL distribution of the public expense ; to prevent some being *burdened* with too great a liberality, and others *eased* by withholding what they justly owe. And lest the calls of the church for such *supplies* should find them unprepared, he instructs them, 1st Ep. ch. xvi. 2. “ Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you LAY BY HIM IN STORE, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” Such were the views which this great apostle, who was ever attentive to every branch of church order and discipline, took of this subject. To give merely if we happen to have

something in our hands when the call is made, will not answer the injunctions of the apostle ; but each individual, according to him, must *lay by in store*, a proportion of his income for the use of the sanctuary.

It is not intended, however, to plead for legal taxation, by which authority is put into the hands of the ministry to distrain the people's property from them, nor to ensure such a permanent income as to feed the proud, the avaricious, or luxurious disposition of fallen man ; but merely by such an equitable apportionment of the public expense, as to afford a reasonable competency to the ministry, and to *equalize* the burden among the people, *as God hath prospered them*. But how can this be done, unless it be first ascertained what the demands of the current year are likely to be ? and then, secondly, each member of the community volunteer to bear an equal proportion, according to his ability ? This might, in some measure at least, prevent, as the apostle has said, "some being *eased*, while others are *burdened*." Is it just that the whole expense of the church should fall on a few liberal souls, as is very frequent-

ly the case, while others, who are more avaricious than religious, do little or nothing? Is not *covetousness* denominated by the apostle *idolatry*? And can that man stand justified before God, who withholds from the church that which he *justly owes* it? God has commanded, “Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth in all good things.” And what shall we say of the man, who looks on with that indifference which selfishness imparts, while he sees his benevolent brethren, who love the cause of God above all things, exerting every nerve to support it? Have such ever considered, *That it is more blessed to give than to receive*? And will they never listen to the voice of justice? Let them not think that we are stepping aside from *our duty*, in reminding them of *their duty*. The apostle Paul left it in charge to Timothy, that he should “charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a

good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. I see no reason why an avaricious man, who withholds that aid which he justly owes, for the furtherance of the gospel of Christ, should have the fellowship of the saints, any more than for an habitual drunkard, or any other immoral man. Each is equally condemned by the law of God.

One very serious impediment in the way of perpetuating an itinerant system is, the want of convenient houses for the accommodation of preachers' families. To remove a family from place to place, and have no convenient residence for their accommodation, is a course of great discouragement. This has been felt by the general Conference; and they have accordingly passed resolutions to obviate the existing difficulty. But it is much easier to make laws than to execute them. Ought not every member of the church, preachers and people, to combine their strength, in order to carry the rules of Discipline, respecting building and furnishing houses, into practical effect?

Let those who have been habituated to comfortable dwellings, consider the privations to which *they* would be subjected, were *they* compelled, almost every year, to remove from ten miles to one hundred, with but little money to bear their expenses, perhaps no house prepared to receive them, and then but a scanty allowance for their maintenance after their arrival! And let them remember, that to such inconvenience many of their preachers are subjected every year. Besides the inconvenience, it subjects us to a great annual expense. Were the money which is now expended annually for moving and injuring furniture, employed in purchasing those articles for domestic use, probably in ten years, the whole amount would be saved to the preachers and stations. How much money, as well as trouble and hardships, might be saved and dispensed with, were another method pursued!

In those places, where houses, &c. are provided, (and, thank God, there are some such) and suitable provisions made for temporal support, the travelling ministry moves with the greatest facility. And were the

ability which exists properly applied to this object, there would soon be no complaint heard in all the land of our Israel, on the subject of annual removals. But unless this is done, the itinerating system of spreading the gospel, which has been our peculiar glory, must gradually weaken, until it breaks under its own weight. The partial locations which have already taken place, on account of this deficiency, by preachers seeking habitations of their own, hang like a millstone around the neck of the itinerancy, and threaten soon to drown it; for those who are thus confined to a particular place, must either remove to an inconvenient distance from their families, or suffer their ministerial usefulness to be very much circumscribed. How many of our able ministers have already been driven from the field for want of temporal support! And many who have worn themselves out in the hard service, are left to feel the sad effects of poverty. O that I could awaken a spirit of emulation upon this subject, both among preachers and people!

Another serious embarrassment, which originates, in some measure, from the same

cause, by producing locations, either in whole or in part, is, that it exceedingly hampers the superintendency in making out the annual stations of the preachers. Those who have temporary habitations, and such as are embarrassed in their temporal circumstances, must be accommodated according to the demands of their local restrictions, or otherwise cease their itinerant labours. This, in addition to fettering the superintendency, leads to local jealousies and distrust. Were every man at liberty to yield to the calls of the church, in respect to moving from place to place, as circumstances might require, it would add vastly to the energy of the government, and tend greatly to give a more diffusive spread to evangelical principles. And the building and furnishing parsonages, with a convenient support, would aid much, I think, in accomplishing these very desirable objects. Locations would be measurably prevented, and thus we should save to the church age, experience, and useful talents. Those who are partially located, would be set loose, and might enter the field of itinerancy with their brethren with greater ener-

gy ; and who would stand before such an army of men of God ?

O ye men of God ! are not these objects of sufficient importance and magnitude to awaken all the dormant faculties of the soul ? What are the glitterings of wealth ? What the trappings of worldly honours ? What are these, when compared to the never-fading glories which surround the heads of those who have turned many to righteousness ? The prospect of being the humble instruments of promoting *peace on earth, and good will to men*, brightens before the Christian minister, and illumines every step he takes in the path of duty.

Having made these remarks upon the necessity of affording a temporal support for the ministers of God, I proceed,

2. To a few observations respecting the duty of the people towards their ministers in a moral and religious point of view. In what may be said on this subject, it will be taken for granted, that the ministry is such as it ought to be, such as is warranted and authorized by the word of God, who are qualified to instruct, and are continually labouring for

the benefit of the people. St. Peter, after exhorting the elders to “feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ; neither as being Lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock,” adds the following very important injunction ; “ Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to the other, and be clothed with humility ; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” 1 Pet. v. 2—5. While he wisely warns the ministers against too great an assumption of power, in being *lords over God’s heritage*, and enforces upon them the necessity of exhibiting the virtues of the Christian character, by *being ensamples to the flock* ; the apostle next inculcates the necessity of that subordination, among the several grades in the church, so essential to the existence and well-being of society ; intimating at the same time, that *pride* alone prompted individuals to refuse subjection to that order which God had established ; hence he exhorts them to

humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, and he would exalt them in due time.

Order, indeed, as a great divine has observed, is the first law of heaven. It stands inseparably connected with that rule of immutable justice upon which the stability of the eternal throne stands, and which shines throughout all the ways and works of God. This order is visible throughout the moral and physical world. Trace the fair fabric of of creation, and how beautifully do you behold the nice gradations from the smallest part of inanimate creation, till you arrive at that inexplicable link which unites the unintelligent and intelligent parts of creation together ! and then let your thoughts stretch over the vast dominion of intelligences, and see how they rise one above another, until your mind ascends to God, who is the Maker of them all ! While each keeps his place, order and harmony prevail. The being discontented with the station any one may occupy, is the beginning of rebellion. If not quashed in its commencement, it will end in discord and destruction.

If we confine our views to the civilized

world, we behold the members of society rising "rank o'er rank," until you arrive to those parts of society where office assumes an authority over office, and one branch of legislative authority over another, and one executive branch over another, until you behold all civil power concentrated in one supreme head, from whence all civil authority emanates. It matters not whether this supreme head be only composed of one, or twenty, or twenty hundred individuals, so long as it is acknowledged to be the sovereign authority, it has, and must necessarily have, an uncontrolled dominion over the whole body. But, in order to check an improper, or destructive exercise of this authority, wise men, in all ages, have found it expedient to set limits to it by constitutional restrictions. By these prudent limitations, the legal authority of legislative bodies has been correctly ascertained; and those laws which emanate from this legal authority, form the bounds and limits for those who are called to obey, and for those who are called to execute the laws.

This order is no less visible in the ecclesiastical, than in the civil world ; and it is recognized, in respect to both, in the sacred Scriptures. “ And he gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying the body of Christ ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Eph. iii. 11—13. And a submission to this order of things which God hath established in his church, the apostle declares to be necessary to prevent being “ tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive,” ver. 14.

Such, indeed, is the present state of human society, however refined by grace, and improved by intellectual culture, that it needs the restraints of law to keep it together, and the influence of executive authority to give it a proper direction. And in this, as well as in every department of moral government,

God has suited his economy to the state of society. In the establishment of the church, God has provided for its unity, peace, and tranquillity, by adapting laws for its government to its condition in this state of imperfection ; and appointed governors to execute them, “not for wrath, but for conscience sake,” and “not for destruction, but for salvation.” These governors, indeed, are limited in the exercise of their functions, by the express declarations of Christ and his apostles ; and their duties, which are both arduous and sacred, are clearly revealed. If they presume to exercise a lordly dominion, instead of being ensamples of meekness and humility to the flock, or to neglect those sacred duties which originate from their high and holy office, they stand responsible, not only to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, but also to that church which they are called to nourish and to watch over.

In this government which God hath established for the well-being of his church, we behold different officers, rising gradually one over another, all of which are bound to move,

not only in union and harmony with each other, but also in subordination one to another. The apostle Paul, in order to illustrate the nice views he had on this subject, has compared the church to the human body; and shows that, as each member of this body has its own peculiar place and functions, so each member of the church has his own peculiar place, and particular duties to perform. His observations are so strikingly illustrative of the present subject, that I make no apology for inserting them at length. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.—For to one is given the spirit of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another; prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, diverse kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh that

one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every one severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ."——"If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

1 Cor. xii. 4—21.

The church is made up of two grand divisions, the *ministry* and the *people*; and they are so dependent on each other, that neither of them can say to the other, *I have no need of you*. Each of these divisions might be subdivided into a variety of members and offices, every one possessing gifts by the *same Spirit*, differing from one another, each use-

ful in its place, and, if used in subordination to one another, contributing to the “perfecting of the saints, and to the building up of the body of Christ.” In this mystical body, every member, and every office, is necessary to its perfection, to its vigour, and prosperity. But as the hand, in a natural body, cannot perform the office of the eye, or head, or foot, so in the spiritual, each member must know and keep his own place ; one must not usurp the place, nor exercise the authority of another. All are necessary, and therefore useful, in their place and order.

It would be an easy matter to apply this illustration to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Christ is the supreme Head of his church. But he hath appointed men to act under his direction—Evangelists, Elders, Deacons, Preachers, &c. every one holding a distinct relation to each other, and to the church generally ; and each having his own peculiar duties assigned him ; and so long as every one moves in his own proper circle, exhibiting that scriptural subordination to which we have already alluded, there will be peace, harmony, and prosperity.

As long as these officers of Christ move in obedience to his will, so long the people are bound to submit to their authority, in all matters of Church government and discipline. Those restless spirits, prompted by pride, and and a vain conceit of their own abilities, who rebel against the order God hath established, rebel against God, and shall receive their own punishment. This is not pleading for submission to the authority of man. It is the authority of God. This is the order He hath established, for the peace and prosperity of his church.

It is granted, indeed, that if the church rulers become so corrupt as to substitute their *own will* for the *will of Christ*, and to impose upon the people unscriptural burdens, the people have a right to abjure their authority, and to seek for redress in an evangelical way. And to prevent the people from such impositions, God hath given into their hands his express declarations, especially on all matters of Christian faith and practice ; so that they may (if they will seek to know) understand their own rights and privileges.

Obedience, therefore, on the part of the people is limited by the word of God.

On this part of the subject, the injunction of the apostle Paul must have weight ; “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves ; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you.” Heb. xiii. 17. An unreserved surrender of our understandings and wills to man merely, we do not suppose is what the apostle designed to inculcate ; but to those who were *approved* and *sent of God*, declaring *his counsel* according to *his word*, the people are bound to submit ; and for this very forcible reason, *For they watch for your souls as they that must give account*. But more especially those ministers whose official duties are clearly ascertained by the discipline of the church, the rules of which are founded on the word of God, and who perform those duties conscientiously, ought to be obeyed ; for it is not to their judgment merely that we submit, but to the authority of God, and to the judgment of the church. This kind of submission to the con-

stituted authorities of the church, in every department, both among the ministry and people, is essential to the prosperity of the church ; as the contrary conduct is productive of wrath, strife, bickerings, anarchy, and confusion. Insubordination is totally destructive of peace and harmony.

It is furthermore the duty of the people to pray much for their ministers. "Brethren," says the apostle, "pray for us, that the word of God may have free course, run, and be glorified"—"that I may open my mouth boldly, and speak as I ought to speak." Those ministers who go forth into the field, commended to the grace of God, and borne up by the prayers of God's people, derive unspeakable comfort from the consideration, that they are the subjects of many prayers. This they ought to do more especially, whenever they assemble to hear the word of God. While Zacharias was in the temple burning incense before the Lord, "The whole multitude of the people were praying without, at the time of incense." Luke i. 10. And surely it is highly becoming a Christian congregation, whenever they assemble before

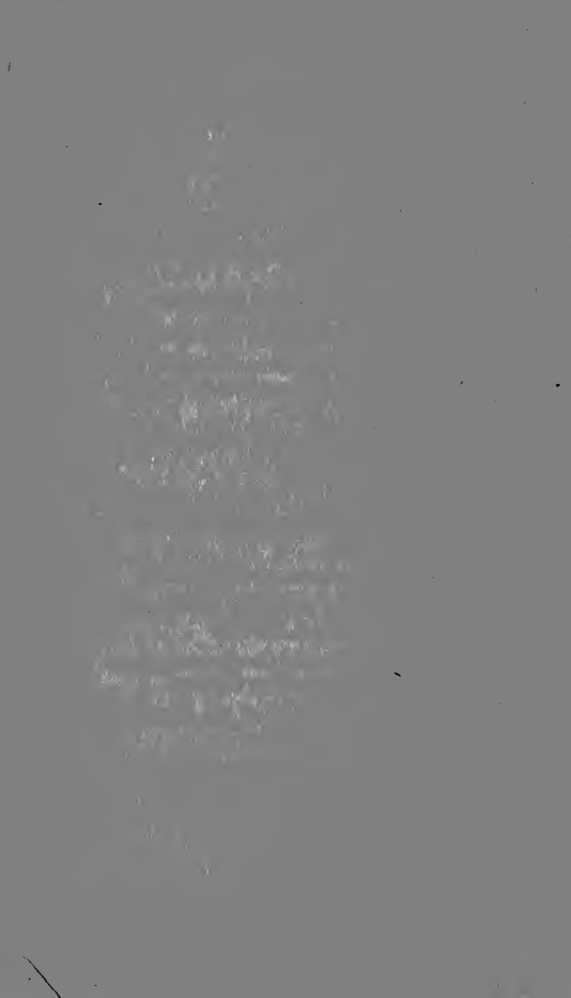
the Lord, to lift their hearts to His Throne, and especially for their minister, that he *may open his mouth boldly, and speak as he ought to speak*. Those who have experienced it, know best how “tremblingly alive all over” a conscientious minister feels, whenever he ascends the pulpit to address an audience in the name of the Lord of hosts. His whole frame is frequently agitated, under a sense of his awful responsibility. How much does he need, therefore, the prayers of the church. *Brethren, pray for us.*

There is also a sort of kindness and affection peculiar to those who estimate a minister of the Lord Jesus, as they ought. If not expressed in word or act, it will show itself in the countenance. How endearing to a minister of the cross, after the toils of preaching, to be seated in the circle of kind and affectionate friends, who solace him by their Christian conduct. Paul felt something of this exquisite pleasure, when in the midst of his Galatian converts; “They were ready,” to use his own words, “to pluck out their own eyes, and give them to him.” This, however, is very far from that fulsome flat-

tery, or idolizing fondness, which is equally unchristian and disgusting. The former is the genuine fruit of Christian love and affection, which every true believer feels for a holy and faithful minister of Jesus Christ.

But I cannot enlarge. These few hints must suffice. Review the subject. If the Methodist ministry be called of God, set apart according to the primitive custom, as we have endeavoured to show, and have been successful in advancing the kingdom of Christ among men, then they ought to be received, supported, obeyed in the Lord, and encouraged by the prayers and kind treatment of God's people. Whether they are such, is now submitted to the candid reader.

New-York, Sept. 6, 1820.



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